

the table, and so our investigation of them was put an end to. That, I am sure, would be the recollection of all the members of the Committee who were present. The four items which I would more especially invite the attention of the Committee to are—the sash-cord, the lead, the glass, and the holding-down bolts. There is another to which I should refer—namely, the tents—but that item did not come to the knowledge of the Committee through Mr. Jenkins's evidence. With regard to the lead, the weight was 3cwt.; that was the weight entered in the yard-book. It was entered by Bridson as 3cwt. 3qr. Here, then, is a piece of lead supplied to order weighing 3cwt.—so it was recorded in the yard-book giving the actual weight; but it is entered in Bridson's figures as 3cwt. 3qr., being an increase of weight to the extent of some 25 per cent.—40lb. or 50lb. He cannot get away from that. He is, so to speak, "cornered." What he says about it is this: that according to the contract schedule lead may be ordered in small pieces; that in consequence there is a large amount of waste; that it is the custom of the trade to charge this waste lead without supplying it to the customer; that here there was a legitimate waste of three-quarters, and the custom of the trade authorised his firm to retain that and not hand it over to the customer. Well, if that is the custom of the ironmongery trade, one ceases to wonder how it is that ironmongers make large fortunes. The explanation about this lead stamps the character of these overcharges upon the whole of them. You have only to recollect the effrontery of this man Bridson in this instance to learn the quality of the specious excuses made for conduct in respect to which there can be no excuse. Other explanations given by him are equally impudent. There is the explanation about the tents. I need only mention this, for the Committee have the whole of the evidence before them. All I have to do now is to ask the Committee to consider these and other explanations given by Messrs. Gellatly and Bridson, and to say whether they are not an insult to the common-sense of the Committee. If they are of opinion that they are, then I say the Committee will come to the conclusion that these two persons, acting perhaps on the curious standard of commercial morality admitted by my friend Mr. Skerrett, have been trying to enhance the profits of the firm by systematic overcharges sent into the Public Works Department, whose check was too weak to discover them. I ask the Committee to decide whether, in the face of the evidence given by Messrs. Gellatly and Bridson, this firm Briscoe, MacNeil, and Co., in giving overcharges in to the department, were taking advantage of the insufficient check in the Public Works Department. They placed no check upon a clerk at £1 15s. a week in respect of supplies under a contract which ran into thousands of pounds. They never heard of repeated corrections in vouchers. I ask the Committee to consider whether the attempted explanations by Messrs. Gellatly and Bridson are not, in respect to those five items, an insult to the intelligence of this Committee. If they are not to be relied on in respect to these items they cannot be relied upon in respect of the others. If you find that their statements are inconsistent, that they cannot be accepted, then you will find that my client has done a public service in bringing these matters to the knowledge of the Public Works Department, in order that they might be able to protect themselves and the department in the future against a system of organized overcharging; and I ask that the Committee should mark its sense of such conduct by allowing my client his expenses, so as to recoup him for his loss of time in bringing about a result (whatever his motive may have been) which will be beneficial to the public service. There is a matter which I omitted to refer to, and to which I beg to draw the attention of the Committee now. Mr. Skerrett said there was a discrepancy between the statement made by Mr. Jenkins to Mr. Blow, according to Mr. Blow's evidence, and the statement made here by Mr. Jenkins in regard to the instructions given by Mr. Bridson. Mr. Blow stated that my client represented to him that these instructions were given—to falsify the weights—written on slips of paper, whilst Mr. Jenkins stated here in his evidence that these instructions were verbal. The explanation is that Mr. Blow confused the "slips" which are exhibits in evidence with those notes which my client had taken down—with slips actually written or altered by Mr. Bridson himself. I do not discover anything of that kind in his evidence. I do not discover that there is any discrepancy or confusion so far as my client is concerned. Any discrepancy or confusion that may have arisen may have been the result either of the manner in which Mr. Blow gave his evidence or the minutes he may have taken at the time being confused with Mr. Jenkins's notes given by himself to the Public Works Department in Mr. Blow's absence.

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