

262. You state that the extra cost of using the hard coal would be £2,000 a year?—Yes.

263. If you use that hard coal in the dangerous period—say, from November to March inclusive—it would be less than £2,000, would it not?—Yes.

264. It would mean £1,000 of difference?—Yes.

265. Is that not a suggestion you would make to the department? You say it would possibly prevent sparks, and that the expense would not be a very large item in excess?—Possibly it would decrease, but it would not altogether stop the chance of sparks, because I know that there have been cases of sparks from hard coal in England.

266. Yes, but the chances are reduced to a minimum by the use of the best coal and the use of the best-known apparatus to stop sparks? In America they universally use the hood. Are you aware of that?—We have it here too. We have the same thing in the deflector.

267. The wire gauze is used in some places, is it not?—No. You may see it in some threshing-engines, but you will not find any statement made before a society by any engineer that he has been able to use it for locomotives.

268. Now, I would like to read a letter sent to you by Mr. Young. It refers to matters that you might explain. It is as follows:—

DEAR SIR,—

Remuera Road, Auckland, 28th December, 1898.

On Monday last, 26th instant, I noticed a fire spread out after the passenger-train passed north past Whangamarino Station, about a mile and a half north of the station, and near where we are stripping bark. I examined the source of the fire, and found it had started from the line, but close up to the line—within 2 ft. or 3 ft. of the rails. The wind was easterly, and the fire spread westward, and went through the plantation; but what particularly struck me was the fact that the fire sprung from the line not from one point alone, but as if it had spontaneously done so from the line and close to the rails along a considerable distance of the line, showing that it could not have been from the locomotive sparks, nor from a match thrown out. The fact that the fire originated along the line close to the rails for such a distance proves, I think, conclusively that the fire was caused by ashes being thrown out from the locomotive. At the time there were only two strippers on the place—Messrs. Green and Stretten—though I do not know if they examined the spot where the fire originated. Where this occurred is not on my property, and I am only reporting the matter to you, but I have long been of opinion that ashes thrown out are often the cause of these fires. As we have now large quantities of bark stripped and lying in the plantations it is very important that all precautions should be taken by the locomotive drivers, and I do not think this is being done.

To the Locomotive Superintendent, Auckland.

WILLIAM YOUNG, Junior.

That letter was written from an actual fact he saw. How can you explain that? Had they dropped ashes from the engine?—They have no occasion to do it. If a man does that he is liable to punishment.

269. At different places along the line you see burnt coal on the line, do you not?—That might be so. The engine may have been ballasting. But what you mention would amount to a flagrant breach, and any man who committed such an act would be punished.

270. The man actually saw this fire, and you say such a thing might occur?—I say it would be a most flagrant thing for a man to do.

271. Flagrant on the driver's part?—It would be the fireman who would do it, but both the fireman and the driver would be liable to punishment. It would be an outrageous thing to do, and, as I have said, there would be no occasion for it. They have their stipulated places where, if desired, they may clean their fires.

272. Have you had any offences of that kind before you?—Many years ago I dropped on a young fireman doing it, but that was before they got into burning the Taupiri coal.

273. You speak about examining the wattle plantation in 1896 after the fire. You say you could not see an unbroken connection between the fire and the swamp and the wattle?—Yes.

274. Do you wish to suggest that the wattle fire was a separate fire from the one in the swamp?—Possibly it was. I tried in Mr. Young's presence to satisfy myself if there was an unbroken connection—a contention which had been strong on his part—but he will tell you that I could not go further than I did.

275. It was an impassable swamp?—If I could have traced an unbroken line it would have satisfied us more that the fire had come from the railway, but I could not swear that it was an unbroken connection. I told Mr. Young that if I had had planks or a man with me I might have made the attempt.

276. You know for a fact that a fire might run on the top—along the rushes?—Possibly it would in a dry season.

277. When there were you not informed that a fire had been caused the same day on the Government plantation?—I do not remember that. I know there was a fire about that time. It was on the Government plantation, but I do not remember the date.

278. Some witnesses said yesterday that the four men who assisted the wattle-planters said they had just been putting a fire out that was caused by the same engine on the Government plantation?—There must be some mistake about that. I remember that Farrell and his gang were on the Mercer side of that fire, some distance away, and they went to put the fire out, but whether it was on that day or after I do not know. I know there was a fire about that time on the Government plantation on the Rangiriri side.

279. What caused it?—I do not know. I know the gang went to help the Government men on the plantation to put the fire out.

280. Is Mr. Clifton up there?—Yes; but Mr. Clifton is not in immediate charge of the plantation—Mr. Kensington is in immediate charge.

281. Is Mr. Kensington coming as a witness?—Yes, I hope so. He has been written to, and is expected to come here at half past 2 to-day.

282. It would be the duty of Mr. Kensington or Mr. Clifton to report these fires?—Yes.

283. Would your department get notice of the fire?—Not necessarily. I know I heard about the fire, but how I got that information I do not know. I know the men went there to help the Government men to put the fire out. There may have been some correspondence.