

1052. When?—I was going over it every day.

1053. You were the Inspector in 1895, and you made an inspection in 1895: did you keep any record of that inspection, or are you speaking now from memory?—I am speaking from memory and observation up to date.

1054. You have no official record of 1895—you are speaking from your recollection?—That is all. All my reports were sent in monthly, and whoever was in charge took possession of them.

1055. You were not officer in charge of the permanent-way in 1900?—Up to the 11th March I was.

1055A. But in July, 1900, you were not in charge?—No.

1056. And you have made no official inspection for the purpose of giving the information you did this morning?—No.

1057. And you have not been asked to do so?—Yes; I was asked by the District Engineer to formulate a statement for my own guidance.

1058. Have you been asked to report on the condition of the rolling-stock and track in 1900?—No.

1059. And you have never made any inspection for that purpose?—No.

1060. And the information you have been giving is just your recollection from previous knowledge?—That is so.

1061. *The Chairman.*] Is it not a fact that you have been asked by your superior officer since February last to make a report on the condition of the line?—I wished to read that letter, which explains itself, but I have not been allowed to do so.

1062. Were you inspector for the Midland Railway Company or the Government at the time of the seizure?—For the Midland Railway Company.

1063. *Dr. Findlay.*] You were in the employ of the Midland Company for how many years before the line was seized in 1895?—I started with the Midland Railway Company in July, 1889.

1064. You were, roughly, about five years with them?—Yes.

1065. And what was your office during all that time?—I was inspector on construction until 1891, and then I was made inspector of permanent-way.

1066. Had you any experience of railway-construction or of railways prior to your employment with the Midland Company?—Yes.

1067. On what lines?—In South Australia, and I was three years with the New Zealand Government on construction.

1068. Then, you would be able, I take it, to compare the condition of the permanent-way of the Midland Company in 1895 with the average condition of the permanent-way of other railways?—Yes, with the New Zealand Government railways principally.

1069. You know Mr. Musgrave?—Yes.

1070. Was he a gentleman who knew what he was talking about?—Yes.

1071. And a gentleman who, if he made a report, would make the report fairly?—Yes.

1072. Do you think the main line, station-yards, and all the sidings on the Christchurch-Reefton branches were kept in good order throughout up to 1895?—I think they were; with the exception of the ballast required, we were making the best of a good job. The top of the road was in good running-order.

1073. You have given us a number of replies about the renewal of sleepers, and parts of cattle-stops, and parts of bridges, and I am not quite sure what you mean by "requires renewing": you said a great many of the sleepers required renewing in 1895?—Yes.

1074. I want to know whether the whole 25 per cent. of the sleepers which you say required renewing in 1895 have been renewed by the Government since then?—That is a big question.

1075. I may take it that you cannot say "Yes" or "No" to the question?—They are going daily along the line renewing.

1076. The impression left on my mind is this: that in 1895 a very large number of sleepers should be condemned as unfit for use. When you say they require renewing, do you mean to say it would be unsafe for the line to continue with these sleepers there, or do you mean renewal in the next four or five years?—I think it would be perfectly safe if the sleepers were renewed in twelve months.

1077. Do you say that the whole of the sleepers which you say required renewing in 1895 should have been renewed within twelve months of that date?—Or as soon as possible.

1078. But not more than twelve months afterwards?—That is a question for the Engineer to decide.

1079. When you say a sleeper requires renewing, how long do you think it could be safely used afterwards?—Supposing we put in two new sleepers under one length of rail, the life of the other seven sleepers would be a question of three years.

1080. Do I understand that if you put two new sleepers under one length of rail they will increase the life of the other sleepers by three years?—Yes; with the exception, of course, of any very bad sleepers.

1081. That would reduce the number of sleepers actually put in proportionately?—Yes.

1082. In regard to the timber in the bridges, was it your duty to examine the bridges and report on them?—Yes.

1083. If you put your condemnation mark on any of that timber, tell us how long afterwards it would be safe to run an engine over the bridge?—It would go on for a year, or perhaps three years.

JAMES FERGUSON NELSON examined on oath.

1084. *The Chairman.*] What is your occupation?—I am foreman of works on the New Zealand railways.

1085. On what section?—On the Westland Section.