

1907.
NEW ZEALAND.

ROTORUA RAILWAY ACCIDENT INQUIRY

(REPORT ON), TOGETHER WITH EVIDENCE.

Laid on the Table of the House by leave.

REPORT.

SIR,—

Auckland, 9th September, 1907.

I have the honour to inform you that, in accordance with the instructions contained in your letter to me of the 20th ultimo (hereto annexed), I have held an inquiry under "The Government Railways Act, 1900," into the circumstances surrounding and cause of the railway accident therein referred to, and now forward herewith—

- (1.) Minutes of the proceedings, evidence of the witnesses examined on oath, and index thereto; and
- (2.) The exhibits referred to in the evidence, and a list thereof.

On Saturday, the 3rd ultimo, the Stationmaster at Putaruru, acting under instructions from the Railway Traffic Department at Auckland (see telegram, Exhibit No. 10), held the No. 11 train, *en route* for Rotorua, at Putaruru till 7 p.m., in order that the "X" special train from Putaruru to Mamaku might be attached thereto. After some shunting had been done these trains were accordingly amalgamated, and when marshalled consisted of two engines, van, trucks, passenger-carriage, and guard's van, as shown in the diagram, Exhibit No. 7. The diagram also shows the length and estimated weight of the train. The train was fully equipped with the "Westinghouse quick-action automatic brake" (the best brake known to the railway world: See evidence of Mr. Beattie, Mr. Marchbanks, and Mr. Robertson), and each vehicle, including the engines, was also fitted with the usual hand-brakes.

The engines, vehicles, brakes, &c., were apparently in good working-order and condition when the train left Putaruru.

Guard Lowe, who superintended the shunting operations, marshalled the train, and took charge of it when it left Putaruru, was killed, and his evidence was therefore not available; but the testimony of the Stationmaster, the engine-drivers, and men who were engaged in the shunting operations and in the coupling of the engines and vehicles at Putaruru was to the effect that, before the train left, the brake and other couplings were all complete and in good order, that the hose-cocks on the brake-tube were all fully open, that the usual brake (Westinghouse) test was properly made, and that the action of the blocks on the wheels of the guard's van at the rear of the train, as seen by some of the witnesses, indicated that the Westinghouse brake was apparently in good order and acting satisfactorily from the engine, at the head of the train, to the hindermost vehicle—the guard's van.

The train left Putaruru shortly after 7 p.m. and in due course arrived at Ngatira, where it stopped for some minutes to fill the water-tanks on the engines prior to ascending the incline towards Mamaku. No brake-test was made at this station, as, according to the existing practice, such tests are not made at intermediate stations, and the guard, apparently, did not consider that it was necessary to have another test made there.

The train left Ngatira, and at once proceeded to climb the incline towards Mamaku, a grade of about 1 in 36 to 1 in 40 (see plan, Exhibit No. 6).

It was a clear night, no wind or rain. The track was in good order, but, owing to frost, the rails were "greasy," and, the load being a heavy though not an excessive one, the train proceeded very slowly up the incline.