

have a deep-rooted feeling that unless they are buying from Hatrick and Co. they cannot expect fair play, and nothing would convince them of the contrary.

(9.) *Disorderly Conduct on Steamers due to Drunkenness on the part of Bushmen and Others.*

—We were informed that the most disgraceful scenes at times occurred on board the steamers owing to drunkenness on the part of bushmen and others. Mr. Hatrick denies this. We were, however, told of this by witnesses whose word could not be doubted. One witness informed us that he had seen and heard drunken men using foul language in the presence of women, and that there did not seem any difficulty in men already the worse for liquor obtaining more on the steamers. From what we can gather the discipline on some of the steamers leaves something to be desired. There would seem to be a slackness which a strict captain would not tolerate. Mr. Hatrick, however, seems to think that his employees on the river service are everything that they should be, and he will not entertain any suggestion that he is deceived.

(10.) *Abuse of Packet Licenses.*—We were told that the packet licenses held by the steamers were grossly abused, and that far more liquor was sold in bottles at calling-places on the river than was consumed legitimately on board. While we were on the upper part of the river witnesses, as a rule, denied all knowledge of the illicit traffic in drink. Lower down, however, the evidence was contradictory. It was stated by more than one reliable witness that whisky was sold from the steamers to Natives and others, while other witnesses alleged they had no knowledge of the traffic in drink. Mr. Hatrick characterized the statements as a “low-down lie” made for the purpose of injuring him. Persons travelling on the steamers may go on board more or less under the influence of drink, and they may also take with them a good deal of liquor obtained in Wanganui. Allowing for all this, and even discounting much of what we heard, we feel satisfied that there is some ground for complaint. It is but fair to Mr. Hatrick to say that a reliable witness, who gave us a strong description of what he had observed, stated that the steward now employed on the steamer to which he referred was much more strict than his predecessor. This would seem to imply that the servants employed on the steamers were responsible, and that the matter was not within the knowledge of Mr. Hatrick. In such a matter as this witnesses are, of course, reluctant to speak freely, as they are often dominated by the feeling that they might be regarded as “informers.”

(11.) *Freight Overcharges and Irregularities.*—It is under this head that the great bulk of the complaints arise. From Taumarunui to Wanganui we heard the same complaints over and over again from settlers. The schedule arranged under the contract has never been printed and circulated, as we think it should have been, and it is so incomplete as to leave room for endless complaints and misunderstanding. Even as it stands we cannot free ourselves from the conviction that the schedule of rates has not always been adhered to by Hatrick and Co. It is difficult to obtain evidence of this, owing to the unbusinesslike habits of many of the settlers. One case was, however, fully substantiated. A settler on the river wrote to Messrs. Hatrick and Co. asking for a quotation for wire and its freight to his landing. The reply, after giving a quotation for wire, stated that the freight was £3 1s. 6d. a ton. The freight under the schedule was actually £2 10s. a ton. The settler wrote to the Postal Department, and Mr. Hatrick was asked for an explanation. The explanation tendered was that the settler must have wanted the wire delivered in 2 cwt. coils, and the company could not agree to handle wire so made up under £3. The settler knew that all wire sent up the river was made up in $\frac{1}{2}$ cwt. coils, but he then wrote to Messrs. Hatrick and Co. specifically asking them for a quotation for *freight on wire in $\frac{1}{2}$ cwt. coils*. The reply he got was a quotation for the *cost of the wire delivered at his landing*. There was no mention whatever of the freight. The settler's statement will be found at page 52 [not printed]. The whole of the documents in this case were produced for our inspection. We could come to no other conclusion than that the settler and the Department had been trifled with by Messrs. Hatrick and Co. If this could occur in one case, obviously it may have occurred in others. The settlers, owing to the want of a complete and detailed tariff, labour under some misapprehension. One man expected that he would get a package weighing 1 cwt. from Wanganui for 1s. because the freight to his landing was £1 a ton. Owing to his total lack of business experience he did not realize there must be a minimum charge on small packages of goods. Upon such premises many of the complaints were founded. Several arguments were put forth that the freight was out of proportion to the value of goods sent in small parcels. Wherever we went we heard the same thing: “If Government would see that a complete and comprehensive tariff were arranged and its contents published, so that the settlers could know definitely what they had to pay in the way of freights, much of the dissatisfaction with the river service would disappear.” The Wanganui Chamber of Commerce at a special meeting passed a resolution to the same effect. The request seems to us a most reasonable and necessary one. Government is to a certain extent hampered by the schedule under the contract, but subject at least to the terms of that schedule a detailed tariff sheet should be drawn up, and Messrs. Hatrick and Co. should