

*Mr. Ostler:* More than that.

*Mr. Gray:* That is all the evidence they have given in reference to these charges, and now we find the charges reduced to the abstraction of the contents of nine letters and the non-delivery of four or five. As to the abstraction from those addressed envelopes, one finds it difficult to conceive what possible object any Post Office official could have in abstracting circulars drawing attention to a meeting and enclosing tickets the sending of which would entitle the recipient to a ticket of admission. Mr. Elliott suggests that there was a conspiracy to obtain tickets of admission. One would have thought that if those in the Post Office wanted to upset this meeting they would have suppressed all the applications for tickets, or attended in such numbers as to prevent the meeting from being a success. One can see no reason, therefore, why the Post Office officials should take the trouble to deliver the empty envelopes if they had been guilty of deliberately abstracting the contents. But is your Worship satisfied that out of these 2,500 the nine complained of were posted with the contents in them? One has only to think how long it takes to put stamps on a hundred envelopes to realize what a task it must be to put stamps on that number multiplied by twenty-five—say, 2,500. Then consider the filling. Mr. Bilby and his assistant are, of course, quite confident that every envelope had something in it; but I venture to say that when these gentlemen did not themselves attend to the filling it is more than probable that when dealing with such a large number of addressed envelopes they may not have known that the contents were not in all of them. It is ridiculous for those two gentlemen to say with absolute mathematical certainty that all those envelopes had the contents in them. Apart from that, I cannot see why it should be in the interest of any Post Office official to try to prevent nine individuals out of 2,500 getting what had been posted to them. No one suggests that those specific nine persons were particularly obnoxious to Roman Catholics or to any one else. Why, then, should nine persons—I am speaking, of course, of their supposed connection with this propaganda—why, then, should only nine persons have been selected as victims of a conspiracy to spoil Mr. Elliott's meeting? That is all, with the exception of the four or five individuals who did not receive their envelopes at all. The gentlemen who are interested in bringing these charges will not allow any room for mistakes on their own part, but there is no positive proof which would satisfy a Court of law that the letters were actually posted. Certain lists have been submitted with tick marks on them. I suppose the utmost that can be said is that the persons responsible thought they had filled all the envelopes. It must be remembered that there are several operations before the envelopes are ready for posting. First, the envelope is addressed from a certain list, on which the address may or may not have been correctly given; then there is the operation, by somebody else, of putting in the circulars or tickets; the letters are then put into the boxes for stamping; then follows the operation of stamping. One can see that there is no time for checking. I submit that there is no proof that these matters as alleged did actually occur. One person said his communication was not received till Tuesday morning, but he admitted that both he and his wife were absent from their home on Monday. There is nothing to say that his letter did not reach his house on Monday afternoon. Another gentleman said that "to the best of his belief" he did not receive his letter till Tuesday morning: he did not speak with certainty—it was a matter of belief: this, I submit, would not be proof. In any case, these matters of delay are matters for which the Censor is responsible and not the Post Office. I have said there is no certain proof that the letters were even posted. Mr. Elliott speaks of a Mr. Symons, but there is no one able to say that that particular letter addressed to Mr. Symons had been put in the post. It was among a lot of other correspondence, and no one knows just how or when it was posted. It is difficult to understand, therefore, the nature of the charges Mr. Elliott has made against the Post Office, or what he suggests. He was invited to make his charges as specific as possible. He steadily refused to supply any information. Instead, he continues to make charges of corruption, and, by neglecting to give the information asked of him, places the officers in the Post-office in Auckland under the stigma of being guilty of corruption and neglect of duty. And, as I have said, I cannot see what was the object. Was it, as suggested, a conspiracy on the part of the Post Office officials and the Government to stop his meeting? What object could the Post Office officials possibly have in detaining his letters and delivering the empty envelopes? Is it likely that any official would abstract the contents and deliver an empty envelope, and thus convict himself of a breach of duty? There is another point that I might mention—that is, the evidence given by Mr. Seabrook, a member of the Committee of Vigilance and an enthusiastic supporter of Mr. Elliott's. His evidence was given to support the allegation that the censorship was exercised in the interests of the Roman Catholic Church. Mr. Seabrook took up a lot of time in proving that he had had correspondence with the Post Office in reference to the prohibition of a newspaper called *The Menace*, a publication which I have not seen until to-day. He proved, however, that this paper, which seems to be devoted principally to the objects so near and dear to the heart of Mr. Elliott, was put on the prohibited circulation list upon the advice of the Solicitor-General, obviously for the reason that it contained matter which brought it within the reach of a section of the Post and Telegraph Act. I understand that the Postmaster-General, Mr. Rhodes, who, I dare say, is no more a Roman Catholic than I am, exercised his powers under the section of the Act because he was advised that the paper contained matter indicating that some persons advertising in it were engaged in business of an objectionable character, to say the least. Later on the ban was removed upon the condition that the importation of that newspaper into New Zealand was to be accompanied by an undertaking from the publishers of the paper that public advertisements of the character objected to would not be inserted, and, so far as is known, this condition has been adhered to. That was before the war. It appears, however, that early in the present year a letter from Mr. Seabrook containing a subscription for the paper was held up. The envelope which contained the remittance was