

30. Well, friction between them?—No; I cannot say there was friction.

31. Have you ever known of instances of friction? [Two names handed up—as to Mr. Rudd.] Did you ever hear of trouble between those two men?—I never heard of trouble; I know there was a little difference.

32. *Mr. Gray.*] Have you any reason to suppose it was on account of religious matters?—Well, religion was brought into the question.

33. I suppose one may expect to find that in every place where there are a large number of men employed belonging to different religious persuasions?—Yes.

34. Nothing special in it?—No—very mild.

35. You work in a room below the Chief Clerk's room?—I do.

36. Have you occasion very often to go into that room?—Not very often.

37. And you do not know much about the Censor's working or his habits?—No.

WILLIAM COTTER, Assistant Head of Mail Staff, Chief Post-office, Auckland, examined.

1. *Mr. Gray.*] What is your name?—William Cotter.

2. What are you?—Assistant head of mail staff in the Auckland Post-office.

3. How long have you been there?—A little over three years.

4. How long in the Postal service?—Twenty-six years.

5. Did you go on duty in the early morning of the 3rd and 5th July?—Yes, at 5 o'clock.

6. Were you then in charge of the mail staff?—Yes, until 7 o'clock.

7. Was the sorting of mail-matter then completed by the night staff?—Yes, it was all completed.

8. Where was it?—The primary cases were all cleared, the correspondence for the private boxes was in the divisions, the counter letters in their divisions, and the letter-carriers' correspondence was in baskets ready to be sent upstairs.

9. What was done after you went on duty: was the ordinary routine followed?—Yes.

10. No special treatment of correspondence?—Nothing at all.

11. Did you see anything lying on the floor which would indicate that anything had fallen out of envelopes?—No; there was nothing on the floor.

12. Have you had experience of sorting?—I have had a fairly wide experience.

13. Would you mind looking at some of these envelopes—they are the ordinary square envelopes: I dare say you are familiar with them?—Yes.

14. I think they are all of the same character. Can a sorter, no matter how expert, sorting a large number of letters of that shape and size tell accurately whether any envelope is empty?—Well, it is possible for him to allow an occasional letter to go through, I should imagine, if he is working very quickly.

15. Well, letter-sorters, I suppose, who have a lot of correspondence to deal with do not waste any time over it?—No; they have to exercise speed.

16. Would you say from your experience that it is not an uncommon thing for a man to pass an envelope with nothing in it without noticing the fact?—It has happened. I do not say it is a common occurrence.

17. Supposing a mail-sorter were sorting 1,250 letters of that character?—It is more likely to happen then.

18. Which had come in by the morning collection and were being sorted in the early hours?—Under the conditions under which these letters arrived, I should say it is more likely to happen than when the letters are mixed. In this case most of the letters would be for the letter-carriers' delivery. There would be a good run for the same divisions in the sorting-cases. A man would go through his work much more quickly, and there would be more likelihood of his passing them.

19. And you must take into account that the 1,250 letters would not be the whole mail?—When that arrived in the office the majority would be lying in the same direction and faced up together, and therefore the man would deal with them at the same time.

20. Would he be justified in supposing that they were all of the same character and would not require any special attention?—Yes; he would work quicker.

21. *Mr. Ostler.*] Have you had a look at these letters?—I have seen these [on the table].

22. Some of those are empty, some full. You have observed that those that are full have a considerable amount of filling—a bit of cardboard and a sheet. They vary—different weights. Take that bundle into your hand: those all contain circulars and cards as far as I know: do you think it likely that with three sortings, as we are told happens in the Post-office, they would be likely to miss the fact that there were empty envelopes?—It is not likely, but it is possible.

23. Anything is possible in this world; but it is not likely?—It is not an everyday occurrence.

24. Do you think that you, with your experience as a sorter, and sorting letters like that all by themselves, would have overlooked the fact that there were nine or ten empty?—It is possible I may have done so, if there was a good run of letters mostly for the same pigeonholes.

25. These, of course, were addressed for all the localities in Auckland, were they not?—They were mostly for Auckland and its suburbs.

26. They would not all go into the same pigeonhole, would they?—Practically.

27. You say it is possible: do you think it is probable?—Well, it is fairly probable. I consider that is the only explanation I can give.

28. How many years have you been a sorter?—I have been in the service twenty-six years.

29. Mr. Williamson has told us it would be a serious offence under certain circumstances if a sorter missed as many as ten empty envelopes in two thousand?—I am explaining how it may have occurred; I do not say a man is blameless.

30. Mr. Comrie was warned because he let through two envelopes like that in mixed correspondence. There is the minute warning him and blaming him for committing some offence. You think it possible; but I do not think you would like to say it is very probable?—It does not often occur.