

Military Censor and not by the Post-office. The Post-office was not in any sense responsible for the delay which prevented those gentlemen from being able to make the announcement from their pulpits of the forthcoming meeting on the Wednesday night. But these particulars I am referring to ought to have been supplied before, and it should not have been left until the inquiry was in course of progress for Mr. Elliott to deign to let the Postmaster know the charges he had to meet. The result of the delay and of particulars being given at this late stage has been to cause a great tax on the Postal staff and a certain amount of disorganization during this inquiry owing to men being taken off their regular duties to attend to the duties of others; and for that Mr. Elliott must be accountable.

Now, as to the charge of non-receipt by the few persons mentioned, I say there is no satisfactory evidence of posting at all which would be accepted in any Court of law—that any letters have been posted except those that have been produced to your Worship—except those bearing the postmark. No check was kept by Mr. Elliott and his friends of the letters posted. It was said about 2,500 were posted. But it is absurd to suppose that the methods adopted by these gentlemen could in any sense be considered to be perfect, or even reasonably good. Different persons had been employed to address those envelopes, different persons had been employed to fill those envelopes with circulars, and different persons had been employed to stamp and post them. Let me give as an instance of want of oversight and control Mr. Rudd's case. Mr. Rudd, who was called here, proved that he had actually received through the post two letters enclosing circulars, and each envelope was addressed in the same handwriting. If that occurred in Mr. Rudd's case, it is quite likely it occurred in other cases. Mr. Gailey complained that he had not received a letter. Inquiry was made by the Post-office, and it was found there was no letter posted addressed to Mr. Gailey, but that one was posted to Mr. "Garley," and the letter-carrier had, very properly, endorsed the letter that it was not for Mr. Gailey, and that a person named "Garley" had not been found. There is another instance which came to light quite accidentally; and it is quite enough for me to say that if one case is established of an error of that kind your Worship is justified in assuming it occurred in a good many instances. Then again, the Postmaster has given instances on the part of business people posting here in Auckland quantities of circular matter such as this, in which cases there were errors that could only be attributable to lack of oversight such as I suggest existed in this particular case.

Then, again, we have had shown here cases of a limited number of envelopes produced to your Worship in which the flaps never had been turned in, indicating another want of oversight on the part of those responsible for filling, and stamping, and posting. Beyond all question it is established that in the cases to which I allude the flaps had never been turned in, because they bear the mark of the machine as incontestable proof of the condition in which they were posted. Now, if in the few cases alluded to by me it is shown that there was carelessness in posting envelopes in that condition, it is quite a reasonable inference that the same thing may have happened in many cases. A letter-carrier actually detected one before it passed through his hands, and there may have been many others. We have shown the whole process through which this collection of letters went from the time it was collected at the Dominion Road post-office until it went into the hands of the letter-carriers for delivery, and there is no suggestion—no ground for suggesting—that any person through whose hands those letters passed, from the time the chauffeur collected them at the posting-box until they went out by the letter-carriers—I say there is no ground for suggesting that any one of the persons through whose hands they passed had the slightest interest, even if so inclined, in preventing them going out in the state in which they were received. It has been suggested that somebody—some person, sorter or letter-carrier—deliberately detained letters, deliberately opened some of them and abstracted the contents, and then had the foolhardiness to deliver the envelopes empty. Now, we have established, I think, beyond all question that neither the sorters nor the letter-carriers have any time to examine letters; they have no right, of course, under the regulations to know what is inside the letters or to examine them to see what the contents may be; and it is plain from the volume of business that passes through this office that any person occupying one of the positions I have mentioned has no time to gratify any desire, even if he had any, to examine letters. I think one sorter said he examined one envelope; he said that in pursuance of his duties he looked inside one to see if it complied with the regulations, and so as to see that the Department was not being deprived of its proper revenue in the matter of postage.

A good deal has been said about the sorting of letters. Illustrations have been given here of methods of sorting, and evidence as to the process. That evidence and the examples of sorting given here conclusively demonstrate that in sorting rapidly a large number of letters it is quite possible for a sorter, no matter how expert he may be, in the rapid process of doing his work, to overlook the fact of an envelope having nothing in it. We know that some of these envelopes were passed in the process of illustrating to your Worship yesterday by expert men who were prepared to say that the envelopes contained matter, whereas in point of fact they were empty. I do not think any reasonable person would say, after hearing the evidence of the sorters, but that it is reasonable to allow that, in the process of sorting, a considerable number of empty envelopes supposed to contain circular matter might easily escape detection; and in fact those persons best able to speak have assured your Worship that it is quite likely that in sorting 2,500 letters, all of the same character, ten or a dozen—the number alleged here—might easily pass undetected. Practically the only person who was disinclined to admit that was Mr. Linton; but then one must consider Mr. Linton's attitude in the matter. He seemed to think—I am not blaming him in the slightest degree—that some unfair method had been adopted of testing him. As to that test, I would like to say that all kinds of tests are necessarily applied in the Post-office in order to see that officers are efficient in their duties and are carrying them