

1880.

NEW ZEALAND.

ENGLISH AND AMERICAN LOCOMOTIVES

(FURTHER PAPERS RESPECTING).

[In continuation of E.-4, Sess. II., 1879.]

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

MEMORANDUM for the Hon. the MINISTER for PUBLIC WORKS.

IN January last year some official correspondence was put before me in the course of the ordinary routine, with a view of eliciting an opinion as to whether it was cheaper to import railway rolling-stock from America than from England. This correspondence comprised an extract of a letter from Mr. W. W. Evans, of New York, the agent who has acted for the New Zealand Government in procuring some American stock; and a letter from Mr. R. M. Brereton to the Agent-General of New Zealand in London.

The letters and my remarks thereon were afterwards, unknown to me, published as a Parliamentary Paper. I think, before the letters were published, the writers should have been consulted, as one of them at least (Mr. Evans's) was not intended for publication.

Mr. Evans replies to my remarks, without a full acquaintance with the subject on which I wrote, in a pamphlet which I append.

The writer discusses the cost of American railways. He condemns the use of crank-axes, grease-boxes, inside connections, heavy conings to wheels, double-headed rails, &c.; he writes about bogie cars, American bridges, and a number of other matters which were not referred to in my memorandum.

Among all this foreign matter, my former remarks are obscured. The purport of the two letters was to the effect that America could supply engines cheaper in first cost, and in every way better, than England. My remarks were to the effect that the Americans could not compete with English in cheapness, and that I did not concur in the universal superiority claimed for American-built locomotives. My brief note was thus concluded:—

“These remarks are not intended to depreciate the merits of Mr. Evans's engines, of which there are now eight working at Christchurch. . . . It is, however, desirable that unqualified statements of the universal efficiency and superiority of American-built locomotives should not be circulated without comment, as they are apt to mislead. The class of locomotives required on a line will always have to be determined by the features of the line, the kind of traffic, and the rate of speed demanded.”

The writer thinks that I have misstated the cost of the locomotives, the prices of which I compared erected under similar conditions in New Zealand. Without a proper explanation appended he might readily arrive at such a conclusion.

The prices could not be compared in widely-differing states of the market, without making a proper allowance for the variation. This allowance was made in my comparison, and there is no error or misstatement, as the writer supposes. The figures gave the relative cost of the locomotives. The general inference drawn from the comparison is more than confirmed by subsequent purchases made in England and America. In the case of the particular prices selected from among those I gave, which the writer refers to, the English engine was ordered in 1873, and the American in 1877. The difference in the state of the market was this: that under the former state the invoice price of the English engine, delivered f.o.b. in London, was £2,125; while in the latter state it was £1,515. These are actual contract prices. The American engines also were landed and erected under favourable conditions and facilities which did not exist when the English engines were imported. Under these circumstances, a bare statement of the sums paid on account of the respective engines at the different dates would have been as misleading as the error I sought to correct, and had I made such a statement I should merely have reiterated Mr. Brereton's error, which was that he took the average cost of locomotives on English lines for a number of years preceding, and compared with the price at which he stated American locomotives could be delivered in the current state of the market.

The cost of the locomotives when the market was high, to which the writer takes particular