

Our Railway Commissioners—Past and Present

SOME INTERESTING FACTS AND FIGURES.

THE Railway Commissioners is a subject that has attracted a large share of public attention of late, owing to the term of office of the Commissioners appointed in 1889 terminating in January, and expectation ran high as to what action the present Government would take with respect to filling the offices then expiring by effluxion of time. All sorts of conjectures were abroad, the main of which proved very wide of the mark when the decision of the Government became known.

In this issue we present our readers with portraits of the two ex Commissioners, Messrs Maxwell and Hannay, together with a few facts respecting their career, which we are sure will prove of interest to a large number of our readers both in New Zealand, Australia, and elsewhere. Also with facts and figures relating to the Department generally.

It is not our intention in so doing to discuss the action of the Government with respect to either those dismissed or appointed, but confine ourselves to matters referring to both as public men. As showing the widespread interest taken in the recent appointment of Commissioners, it forms the subject of a leading article in the Melbourne *Argus* of January 27th, from which we make the following brief extract:—'Those who have watched the course of events since the railways were placed under this Board, will be inclined to say that, however doubtful the experiment may have appeared at the outset, it has worked well. The Commissioners preserved their independence and their impartiality in the teeth of the most menacing pressure brought to bear upon them at the time of the strike, immovably upholding the principle that the railways of the colony were not to be made an instrument of the boycott at the dictation of one particular class. Their attitude undoubtedly won them the approval of all who value firmness and rectitude in public affairs.'

THE PAST FIVE YEARS' RECORD.

That the record of the retiring Commissioners has been an exceedingly good one can be seen by the official reports of the department, from which we take the following particulars: In 1879-80, the year preceding Mr Maxwell's appointment as General Manager, the revenue had fallen considerably, while the expenditure had increased. The following year, with 105 miles of additional line, the revenue increased by £74,000, while the expenditure decreased by £58,000. Ever since, during the management of Messrs Maxwell and Hannay, as General Manager and Assistant General Manager respectively, and while the department was under Ministerial control, there was still a steady improvement in every branch. At the appointment of the Commissioners in the beginning of 1889, the net earnings from the railways represented a return of £2 12s per cent. on the capital cost. The next year this had risen to £2 19s 5d, and at the end of the fourth year it was £3 1s per cent. As a comparison the average results of the four years preceding the control of the Commissioners and of their four years of administration are given. The average for four years—

	Revenue.	Expenditure.
1886-1889	£1,109,561	£580,946
1890-1893	£1,128,556	£705,537
Increase	£118,995	224,591

An average of 110 miles more railway has been worked during the latter four years. The capital expenditure has been augmented by £1,260,283, and the interest earned has also increased as stated above. In spite of this, however, the cost of administration was not sensibly increased, nor has it been necessary to raise the rates of carriage to obtain these results. On the contrary, the Commissioners state in their last report they have endeavoured to conform to the spirit of the age, believing that the railways should be worked for assisting the development of the resources of the colony rather than in a narrower commercial spirit which has in view the extraction of the uttermost farthing from the producer. In pursuing this course they have also been guided by the Government Railways Act, in which Parliament has laid down that due consideration should be given to the promotion of settlement and the encouragement of industries. On these grounds they have made it one of their objects to reduce rates and charges affecting colonial products extensively. The extent to which this had been done was shown by returns presented to Parliament during the last two sessions—and that the principle had been applied prudently and advantageously is shown by the progressive character of the railway traffic and revenue.

During the late Commissioners' term of office the lines and appliances have been thoroughly maintained, and their character and capacity have been improved in the process of maintenance from working expenses, and concurrently with the lowered charges, improved revenue and economical administration, the Commissioners have been able to show

beyond doubt that the railways are better, both in capacity and equipment, the carriage and waggon stock is more extensive and convenient, and the engine and brake power are greater and better adapted to the traffic than when they took office. The time-tables also have been very materially improved, and the train times quickened on all the larger sections. The stock of stores in hand has been increased in value during the Commissioners' term of office by £7,778. In handing over charge of the railways last month, the Commissioners do not fail to express their gratification at being able to bear testimony to the loyal and intelligent services rendered to the colony by the large staff of officers and men during their tenure of office, and everyone who is acquainted with the fine body of men who compose the railway service in this colony will admit the justice of this remark. That this state of affairs is in a large measure due to the careful administration and control of the Commissioners themselves cannot be denied, and they have good reason for saying as they do, that the system introduced in 1880 (by Mr Maxwell) of engaging lads only in different branches of the service and training and educating them for the various duties, and the system of classification of pay, and promotion from the lower to the higher grades, have answered excellently. The service is now manned by officers and men for the most part trained to railway and telegraph work on the colonial railways, under the regulations and scale of pay and promotion referred to; and it may be added, a very large proportion of those so trained are of New Zealand birth. The total mileage of new lines opened during the past five years is 172.

The permanent way has been improved by re-laying to the extent of 134½ miles in 53lb steel rails, and a large number of bridges and structures originally constructed of soft woods have been more permanently reconstructed in masonry, iron and hardwood timbers. The aggregate power of the locomotives has been increased by rebuilding improved types. Out of working expenses alone the power has been increased 81,356 lbs, equal to about 5 per cent., representing rather more than 17½ '2' locomotives. Two powerful locomotives are now being constructed from working expenses, and two are being compounded. A large number of improvements have been effected in details of the engine, and a system of boiler inspection has been perfected. By rebuilding and improving a much superior class of vehicle has been secured, while the seating accommodation has been increased by over 7 per cent., representing 27 of the largest class 'A' carriages in use. The aggregate waggon capacity has been greatly increased, and many improvements made in detail. No less than 1,683 vehicles have been fitted with improved draw gear. The brake vans and brake power have been increased by rebuilding. Five years ago there were only six bogie brake vans, now there are forty-two. The effect of the improvements to rolling stock and engines has been to reduce failures and delays to a minimum, and promote economy. Important improvements have been made in the workshops, amongst these being a complete hydraulic riveting plant and first-class boiler constructing machinery, as well as milling machinery. During the five years tools and machinery of the most recent type to the value of £7,000 to £8,000 have been added to the workshops out of working expenses, enabling the department to construct its own new locomotives, carriages, waggons, and everything required on the railway. For new mileage, some 172 carriages, trucks, etc., have been provided out of capital account, and 31 carriages and trucks and two locomotives are being constructed for the same purpose.

The Chief Engineer's report on the condition of the lines states that their mileage is now 1,948 miles 52 chains. They have been very considerably improved during the past five years. Rails have been relaid over 134 miles 20 chains—40 and 30lb iron rails over 110 miles 20 chains, 40lb steel over 1 mile 40 chains, and 52lb iron over 22 miles 40 chains, have all been replaced with 53lb steel rails. The standard number of sleepers per rail length has been increased during the last 15 months, involving the use of 30,000 extra sleepers and giving additional stability to about 70 miles of main line. Some 651,000 8in x 5in sleepers have been put down during the past five years, replacing 7in x 5in. The considerable improvements effected during the past five years cover every detail of the permanent way and works, buildings, bridges, and water supply. All these have been paid for out of working expenses, and represent an increased aggregate value of £74,000.

The Stores Manager reports that the value of stores in hand on 9th December, 1893, was £104,373, as against £96,595 on 31st March, 1889. The stock is in good order, sufficient for requirements, and it has been carefully inspected annually.

The systematic consolidation and standardising of the

accounts, regulations and instructions has also formed a prominent feature of the administration of the last fourteen years, and New Zealand can now boast of the possession of a system which has received unqualified approval from railway managers and experts of the highest reputation.

THE LATE COMMISSIONERS.

MR J MCKERROW.

Mr James McKerrrow, F.R.A.S., Chief Commissioner of New Zealand Railways, was born at Kilmarnock, Scotland, on 7th July, 1834. He was educated at the new and old academies of his native town, and at the University of Glasgow. He arrived at Dunedin from the Home country in 1859, and having passed the examinations of the Survey Department, was appointed a member of the Otago staff, under the late Mr J. T. Thomson. For two years he was



Wright'sworth and Binn, photo. Wellington.

MR JAS. MCKERROW, F.R.A.S.

engaged on road and settlement surveys. Towards the end of 1861 the urgent necessity arose for extending a reconnaissance survey over the interior mountainous part of the Otago Province, now known as the Lake Districts, so as to enable the Government to deal with the inflow of the sheep squatters and miners, who had by this time occupied large areas on what was then a blank *terra incognita* on the map. A knowledge of practical astronomy was a necessary qualification for this work. An opportunity was given the field officers of the staff to submit to a test examination on that subject, resulting in Mr McKerrrow, the junior officer, being entrusted with the work, which he completed within two years, having surveyed, mapped, and reported on 8,000 square miles of a very rugged country to the entire satisfaction of the Government. Sir Roderick Murchison, in his annual presidential address to the Royal Geographical Society of London, classed this survey as one of the most important additions to geographical knowledge of the time. From 1863 to 1866 Mr McKerrrow was engaged on the Geodesical survey, and thereafter until 1873 he was Inspector of Crown Lands and Goldfields Surveys, when he was appointed Chief of the Otago Survey Department. On the abolition of Provincial Governments in 1876 their functions were assumed by the General Government. Mr Thomson was appointed Surveyor-General of the colony, with Mr McKerrrow as his Chief Assistant, the latter also holding the office of Secretary for Crown Lands and Goldfields. In 1879 Mr Thomson, having completed the organisation of the Survey Department, retired from the public service, when the appointment of Surveyor-General was conferred on Mr McKerrrow, which he held with the other Departments named until January, 1889, when the Government of Sir Harry Atkinson offered him the position he now holds of Chief Commissioner of Railways. This appointment was a surprise and even a disappointment to many, as the public had been led to expect that a railway expert from some of the Home railways would have been selected for the post. For, although all recognised the ability and success with which Mr McKerrrow had managed the departments charged with the survey and settlement of the colony, no one thought of him as a railway manager. Nor did the Government select him for any technical knowledge of railways (that was well provided for in the appointment of the other two Commissioners—Messrs Maxwell and Hannay), but for his intimate and thorough knowledge of the resources and wants of the various districts of the colony, and above all for the excellent record he had established of being able to exercise great official powers with firmness, tact, and moderation. Very great powers were conferred on the Chief Commissioner by the Government Railways Act, 1887, and no such powers were ever conferred on a public officer in New Zealand before. That they have been used wisely and well during the past five years few will deny, and the best confirmation of that is, that the present Government, although objecting, it is understood