

# A NEW ZEALAND INVENTION.

*The Story of the New Zealand Stage System, and the Hungarian Adoption of it.*

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NE of the things that strikes me with wonder is the very small amount of attention paid by our governing men, and the general public, to the *vast importance of the road*. The road absolutely governs our social and commercial conditions, and these conditions will be happy and prosperous, or miserable and depressed, very much as the road is good and well managed, or otherwise. Without roads (I, of course, am using the word in its widest sense) nothing, absolutely nothing, can be done. There can be no advance, no production, no social intercourse, no civilisation. And yet what little attention we pay to this great matter.

We have now been in this country for over sixty years, and still we are without any proper overland communication between its two chief cities, Auckland and Wellington, as indeed also with Napier and New Plymouth. This fact shows how little the great question of roads has occupied the public mind.

War time brings vividly before us the great value of the road, and should we be involved in war, we shall have to pay for our neglect of it. What support, in such an event, could Hawke's Bay, Taranaki, or Wellington get from Auckland under existing circumstances?

Railroads are our best form of roads, they are now our great highways, and to reform their administration, to reduce the present chaotic mass of charges and regulations to something like order, to greatly reduce the charges made, to render these highways available in every district, and by every individual, was the task I set myself in 1882. Probably it is well, that we do not always know all that our work means, at the time we enter upon it.

When once the Stage System was before the New Zealand public it commanded a very large share of attention. The Press, with its

usual liberality, from one end of the colony to the other, devoted considerable space to its discussion. It soon attracted the attention of our Parliament, and in July 1883, the Hon. J. A. Tole asked the Minister for Public Works if he was prepared to give it a trial. He replied in the negative. This was the first occasion on which the Stage System was mentioned in Parliament. In every subsequent session it has commanded more or less attention, and has several times divided the House.

Unfortunately, from the very first our chief railway officials took up a hostile attitude towards the new system, and still more unfortunately, in spite of the unanswerable evidence in its favour, they still maintain it. Why is it that professional men, almost invariably reject and resent any suggested improvement that comes to them from outside? They might remember that reforms rarely, if ever, come from within, but almost invariably from without.

One of my great aims was to simplify railway charges and classification, and after the continuous study of seventeen years, I still say that there is not the slightest need for the multiplicity of charges, and the terrible confusion that now prevails.

When I took this matter in hand we had 1,333 miles of railway, and to work them, it was thought necessary to have a system of charges that took forty-two pages of closely printed foolscap to describe, there were fifteen different classes of merchandise, seventeen parcels rates, special rates, etc., and to interpret this mass of confusion there were seven hundred and sixty alphabetical references.

What is the number of rates in existence on our railways at the present time, I do not know, I have long since given up trying to follow them; suffice it to say that the confusion grows more confounded every year. It must not be thought that this complexity is in anyway necessary, it is part and parcel