

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

THURSDAY, 11 NOVEMBER 1880

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

Thursday, 11 November, 1880.

Formal Business.—Hemmant's Petition—resumption of debate.

The SPEAKER took the chair at half-past 3 o'clock.

FORMAL BUSINESS.

The report of the Select Committee upon Coote's petition was laid upon the table, and, on the motion of Mr. O'SULLIVAN, ordered to be printed.

On the motion of the Hon. J. DOUGLAS, the report of the Library Committee was ordered to be printed.

On the motion of the PREMIER (Mr. McIlwraith), it was resolved :—

That the limit imposed by Sessional Order upon the duration of the sitting of the House on Fridays be withdrawn for to-morrow.

HEMMANT'S PETITION—RESUMPTION OF DEBATE.

The adjourned debate on Mr. Archer's motion—That the report of the Select Committee on Mr. Hemmant's petition, laid on the table of the House on the 4th instant, be now adopted—being resumed,

Mr. DOUGLAS said he intended to support the motion for the adoption of this report. Practically it might be said there were two reports; one of them was signed by the Chairman of the Committee, and added to that was a protest signed by Mr. Griffith, Mr. Dickson, and Mr. McLean. These two reports gave, or professed to give, a history of the transactions, with the conclusions arrived at by what he might call both sides. He was content to accept the report of the committee as a whole on the leading features of the case, and chiefly on the ground that it made certain recommendations which the evidence justified, and without which the inquiry would not be complete. He should begin first by referring to the last recommendation—by referring, in fact, to what had commenced and been the source of the whole trouble. The 28th clause said—

"Your committee recommend that no contract for the supply of railway material shall in future be made in the colony, subject to ratification (except by telegram) in England. Should prices rise before the date of ratification, the contractors will decline to ratify; should prices fall, the Government will not be free to benefit by it."

With that recommendation everyone must agree. It clearly came out as the result of the negotiations between Mr. Thomassen and Mr. Macrossan. The committee, in commenting upon this matter, indicated their opinion pretty strongly that the Minister for Works had committed an error of judgment in entering into these negotiations; but he would refer to that at a later period, and would now simply take notice of it as one of the strong recommendations of the committee. The other recommendations of the committee were in reference to the charge referred to under clause 17—

"They recommend your Honourable House to take such steps for further investigation as to it may seem fit."

This charge referred especially to the conduct of the Agent-General, Mr. Ashwell, and the favouring of the firm of McIlwraith, McEacharn, and Company. The next recommendation, and probably the most important of all, was that which was contained in clause 22—

"That, in the opinion of your Committee, there are many matters in connection with the inquiry, so far as the rails and freight contracts are concerned, which have not been satisfactorily explained; and

"They recommend your Honourable House to take such steps for further investigating these matters as may to it seem best."

That recommendation referred to the four preceding clauses, and it embraced a large field of inquiry. It referred to the matters spoken of in clauses 18, 19, 20, and 21; and, being so, it opened up a very wide field for inquiry. On those grounds he was quite justified in supporting the finding of the committee. It, in fact, justified the procedure that up to the present time had been taken in connection with the question both of steel rails and freight. It admitted that upon inquiry in the colony a substantial case had been made out for further inquiry at any rate, and that no final judgment could be given until that inquiry was exhausted. The hon. gentleman at the head of the Government had stated that he would be prepared to recommend a commission to consist of one person from this country, and another to be appointed by the colonial office. His hon. friend,

the member for North Brisbane, in referring to this subject, spoke of course guardedly, but intimated his satisfaction, at any rate, that the principle of the recommendation had been recognised; and that the Government now saw fit, or were about to see fit, to recommend to the House the appointment of a commission. He (Mr. Douglas) expressed his own opinion when he said that he did not think the appointment of one person alone from this country would be deemed satisfactory. There was no one that he could think of who would really thoroughly enjoy the confidence of both sides, and without that they could not satisfactorily proceed to further investigation. There were several grounds for believing that it would not do entirely to leave this investigation in the hands of the Colonial Office. He had not the slightest doubt that three impartial men could be appointed by the Colonial Office, who would very well investigate the subject. He believed himself that if it was left in the hands of an ordinary firm of solicitors of high standing, they would obtain all the evidence that could be obtained; but that would not satisfy the people of this colony, whose feelings, whose passions probably, had been roused in connection with this question. Under those circumstances, therefore, the appointment of any one man would not satisfy the conditions of a thorough inquiry. He knew his hon. friend the member for North Brisbane took exception possibly to the appointment of a Minister; from his point of view, that seemed to be objectionable. From his (Mr. Douglas') point of view, he must confess it was no objection; in fact, it had some recommendation. A very essential part of this inquiry must be connected with the London office, and it was very important indeed and desirable in itself that a member of the Ministry should be on the spot in connection with that branch of the inquiry in order to satisfy himself as to the exact merits of the case. He personally should have no objection even if the Minister for Works himself was appointed. It might be said possibly, that the hon. gentleman—perhaps he (Mr. Douglas) would be wrong in saying it—was one of the culprits, though he believed that he really had been the source of all the unpleasantness that had arisen out of this question. As he had said, he should have no objection even to the Minister for Works being appointed as one, and he did not see himself why the leader of the Opposition should not be another. The Colonial Secretary took some exception to the possibility of such an appointment being made in the course of the debate yesterday; but he trusted that when the matter was fairly considered, and it came to be seen that in this matter it was most desirable that both views of the question should be thoroughly represented by a competent man, whoever this man might be. He had merely pointed to those two gentlemen as men who would be in every way competent to enter into a thorough investigation of such a case. He had, however, only expressed his own opinion in the matter, and had pointed to them as gentlemen in every way fitted, both from their knowledge of the subject, and from their inherent capacity to satisfy the public as to the means they would secure in order to effect a thoroughly exhaustive inquiry. Of course, in connection with these gentlemen, it would be necessary and most desirable that somebody, on the advice of the Colonial Office, though he trusted not immediately connected with the Colonial Office, but somebody who enjoyed the confidence of the Secretary of State—a man competent to undertake such an inquiry—should be associated with these gentlemen. He should have no objection that even more than one should be associated with them. And, a competent board of inquiry or commission having

been thus constituted, he must confess himself that he would rather that their duties should not be confined merely to collecting evidence. Reference had been made to the desirability of their being allowed only to inquire into this matter, but he (Mr. Douglas) thought that they should be empowered not only to inquire but to report upon the evidence. For himself he should rejoice at having reached a final judgment upon this knotty question. It was not one which he thought should be retained alive any longer than they could possibly help. Let them, by all means, come to a decision, whatever that decision was. He was thoroughly for an investigation—an exhaustive inquiry; but that being done he should be glad to end the controversy. The controversy had been thoroughly justified by what had been disclosed; but he should be glad that as soon as it possibly could be done, the subject should be exhaustively treated and finally closed. Having said so much with regard to the appointment of a commission, he just wished to refer to a few other matters connected with the report. He would not detain the House very long—indeed, he might perhaps just as well have concluded his remarks, and possibly should have done so if it had not been that lengthy references had been made to the evidence which was taken by the committee. Such reference having been made, he did not feel justified in allowing the occasion to pass by entirely without making his own remarks upon some of the features of the case as they occurred to his mind. In reference to the inception of this inquiry arising out of the negotiations of the Minister for Works with Mr. Thomassen, it appeared that in the middle of August Mr. Thomassen was in correspondence with the Minister for Works with a view to tender for the supply of these rails; in the middle of August he said because it was important just to notice that these negotiations extended over a considerable length of time; and he would just here remark that he thought himself that, so far from the proceedings of the previous Government with which he was connected being held as a justification, the matter should be viewed in quite a different light; he viewed the transaction the late Government had with Mr. Thomassen rather as a warning, and the Minister for Works should have viewed it rather in that light. He himself, pointed out that the transaction as between the late Government and Mr. Thomassen was not a wholly satisfactory one. It was revised, and very properly revised by the Agent-General himself. Better terms were obtained than were obtained from Mr. Thomassen by the Minister for Works at that time. No doubt the Minister and the Ministry, in the negotiations with Mr. Thomassen, at that time acted with the best intentions, believing they could obtain a better bargain than through the Agent-General. It seemed to him that the only grounds upon which such a bargain ought to be made would be the delivery of any goods of that kind here subject to test, but that was a condition to which few contractors, he suspected, would submit to. It was a condition which had been submitted to in the case of their telegraph wire. The telegraph wire which had been in use here was for many years bought from a gentleman who almost enjoyed a monopoly of the supply of a particular article, specially prepared for the purpose on these terms, viz., of testing the article on arrival here. If they could make a bargain with the contractor of that kind he admitted it was possible or might be desirable, under some circumstances, to enter into it, though he doubted whether any contractor for steel rails would submit to any such bargain as testing the quality of the rails on arrival here, and not on departure from England. The

Minister for Works had himself referred to the unsatisfactory nature of the bargain with Mr. Thomassen, made by the late Government. The Minister for Works stated with regard to the previous arrangement that had been made on the part of the then Government with Mr. Thomassen that—

"The result was that through the active agency of Mr. Macalister a considerable sum was saved, but still between £5,000 and £6,000 was paid over the market price. Had the tenders been called in London that would never have happened. Further, that contract had had a most damaging effect upon the permanency of the works then under construction. Those rails were 35-lb. rails, for the Maryborough and Gympie Railway; and he had the authority of the Executive Engineer for saying that had the contract been let in England for 4½-lb. rails, they could have been supplied for the whole sixty-three miles at an additional cost of only £1,600."

So far from quoting the action of the previous Government, therefore, in justification of his dealing with Mr. Thomassen, he ought to have quoted exactly in a reverse direction. They were not justified by anything that had occurred between the previous Government and Mr. Thomassen in assuming that a second and more satisfactory bargain could be made. However, the hon. gentleman proceeded to correspond with Mr. Thomassen, and in the meantime, at a later period, on September 2nd, the Colonial Secretary telegraphed, possibly at the suggestion of the Minister for Works, to the Agent-General. This telegram would be found at page 7 of the "Contract and correspondence relating to the supply of steel rails," called for by Mr. Bailey, and was as follows:—

"Brisbane, 2nd September, 1879.

"AGENT-GENERAL.

"Telegraph price of forty-one pounds steel rails. Can you contract for thirty-thousand tons delivery London spread equally over next three years fastenings to match what prices.

"PALMER."

In reply to that, on the 5th September, Mr. Macalister telegraphed:—

"London, 5th September, 1879.

"TO PALMER, BRISBANE.

"For immediate delivery about five seven six during next year five twelve six f.o.b. nearest port to works Contract cannot be placed distributed over three years a further rise being anticipated Fastenings average about twelve pounds for early delivery.

"MACALISTER."

At that time, evidently, the Minister for Works thought—so he inferred—that 30,000 tons of rails would suffice, and he very properly applied direct to the Agent-General. It would have been much more desirable if the hon. gentleman had stuck to that line of negotiation. The Agent-General was the authorised medium for conducting those affairs, and the probability was that nothing would have been heard of those unpleasantnesses if he had stuck to the legitimate way of doing business in the prescribed fashion. In spite of that, he was led by Mr. Thomassen to believe that he had ample authority from his firm;—and in that respect he (Mr. Douglas) entirely disagreed from the finding of the committee that Mr. Thomassen had authority from his firm. It seemed conclusively proved—whatever Mr. Thomassen's statements may have been, and in some respects they were not believed by the committee—that Mr. Thomassen had no such power; and yet, in the face of the clearest evidence to the contrary, the committee said Mr. Thomassen had the power to make contracts. That agreement was placed under the purview of Mr. Little, who was perfectly justified, it seemed to him, in saying that Mr. Thomassen had no authority whatever which would justify the Government in arriving at the conclusion that he had the authority of Ibbotson

Brothers to make any final agreement. Paragraph 10 of that agreement was as follows :—

"The traveller shall have no power or authority (by anything herein contained or otherwise) to draw any bill or bills, or draft or drafts on the company, or to sign any promissory-note, bill, or other document or obligation whatever against the company, or on their behalf, unless any such case or occasion for any such note or otherwise shall have been specially authorised or agreed to in writing by the company according to the exigencies of any particular case."

Such being the case, it seemed the height of folly for the hon. gentleman to have continued his negotiations with Mr. Thomassen. He should at once have stopped all negotiations with a man who was nothing more than an able, unscrupulous schemer—a man without any authority from the company he professed to represent, slippery in every respect, and competent to gain the best of a bargain with anyone whom he came across. For instance, he committed Mr. McEacharn to an unconditional bargain, while he left himself open to turn up Mr. McEacharn whenever he thought fit; and he did the very same thing with the Minister for Works, whom he wound round his finger—in fact, the hon. gentleman was a perfect child in Mr. Thomassen's hands. He must say, in all fairness and candour, that the hon. gentleman seemed to have shown his full incapacity for dealing with matters of administration of large moment. No doubt the hon. gentleman did his best, but his best was as bad as it could be. If the hon. gentleman had been a clerk in a mercantile firm or company, and had entered into a negotiation of that nature, they would have been perfectly justified in instantly dismissing him as incapable of doing business in a business-like way. In this matter the hon. gentleman had fair warning, and by his blundering in the department, for which he was responsible, he had plunged the colony into the terrible muddle in which it was now labouring. He would repeat emphatically that the Minister for Works had displayed a great incapacity for administration, and that, by going out of the path prescribed by usage and entering into negotiations with Mr. Thomassen, he had prevented other persons who were likely to come forward from tendering. It was distinctly stated that in consequence of Mr. Thomassen's bogus offer, genuine men who would have conducted the transaction to an issue were prevented from coming into the field. On that transaction he trusted he had been sufficiently explicit. How the Government came to recognise Mr. Thomassen, and how the Premier came afterwards to recognise him in England, he was at a loss to know; but the Premier required from him a renouncement of his bargain, which it was not in his power to give. Mr. Thomassen seemed to be the *bête noir* of the colony; certainly he was the *bête noir* of the Minister for Works; and the Premier himself had no very flattering opinion of the discretion displayed by his colleague. In question 2238 of the evidence the chairman asked the hon. gentleman at the head of the Government—

"Then you think that the circumstances of the case justified the Minister for Works in signing a conditional contract, giving three months for ratification? I do not think you should ask that, Mr. Archer; it is asking me to express an opinion upon the action of my colleague."

He had not the slightest doubt that that meant that the hon. gentleman was clearly of opinion that his colleague had made a bargain unjustifiable under any circumstances.

The PREMIER: The hon. gentleman is not expressing my opinion.

Mr. DOUGLAS said he did not pretend to do so; he was merely giving his own interpretation

of it. That interpretation might be wrong, but it was the interpretation which must be put upon it by all reasonable and business men. There never was a more disgracefully unbusinesslike transaction than that which was carried out between the Minister for Works and Mr. Thomassen. With reference to the telegram of the 2nd September, which he had just quoted, it seemed probable that the information would reach Mr. Ashwell, and if Mr. Ashwell knew, probably Mr. Andrew McIlwraith would also know; and Mr. Andrew McIlwraith, hearing that such an amount of rails was required for the Queensland Government, made his calculations accordingly, and subsequently went into the market on the basis of that information. He would here say a word or two with regard to the mutilated telegrams. That mutilation was in itself a kind of mystery. Mr. Thomassen's bargain broke down, as he said—if they could believe him—because of a mutilated telegram—on account, as he said, of an unfortunate blunder; and he professed to be willing to supply the committee with a photograph of the telegram to show what the blunder was. But other blunders in telegrams had been made, and Mr. McEacharn had blundered in a fortunate direction. The telegram was mutilated, but it was mutilated to the effect of advising Mr. Andrew McIlwraith to go into the market to the extent of 30,000 tons. For his own part he did not believe in mutilated telegrams. When in office he had sent a great many telegrams, and he found that with a very little trouble telegrams came through quite intelligibly. He had always held that whenever there was any doubt as to the meaning of a telegram it was the duty of the Government to require a repetition of it; and if Mr. Thomassen had—as the Minister for Works believed—power to enter into the contract, it would have been worth while spending a large sum of money to close the transaction; for it was a most tempting bait to take rails at the price they were quoted at by Mr. Thomassen. He had already expressed his theory as to the probable means by which Mr. Andrew McIlwraith obtained the information which induced him to go into the market for the purchase of such a large number of rails. It was no doubt a hazardous speculation, but he had made his calculations; and, as he was acting on the best information obtained from Mr. Ashwell in the London office, he could afford to risk something if he knew exactly the ground on which he stood. He would now say a few words in connection with the London office, and he would begin by going back a few years to the time referred to in the debate yesterday, which was a crisis in the history of the office. During the recess of 1875 Mr. Macalister went to England to investigate the condition of the Agent-General's Office, which had for some time been considered unsatisfactory. Mr. Daintree was in bad health, and Mr. Wheeler, it was proved, had entered into doubtful transactions with those who supplied the colony with goods, and there were serious defects in the immigration system. The result of the investigation was the dismissal of Mr. Wheeler. He (Mr. Douglas) was at first inclined to regret that the Government had taken such precipitate action, but events had since justified the course pursued by the Government. The report addressed to the Governor by Mr. Macalister on that occasion were to be found in the "Votes and Proceedings" for 1876, vol. 2. In connection with that, he would remark that the inquiry in England on that occasion contrasted very favourably with the inquiry instituted this year by the Premier; but it was not necessary to refer to that in detail. He would merely add that the paragraph with which Mr. Macalister wound up

his report might well be applied to that gentleman himself at the present time. It was as follows:—

"I would remark, in conclusion, that it was apparent that Mr. Daintree had been made the victim of a combination of men who secured his confidence and afterwards abused it; and that until that combination was broken up it was impossible to obtain evidence against any of the members of it."

That concluding paragraph would apply, under the changed circumstances, to Mr. Macalister himself. A change, no doubt, had come over the office. When Mr. Hamilton succeeded Mr. Wheeler he for some time acted as Agent-General to the satisfaction of the Government for the time being, and to the satisfaction of most of those who were acquainted with the office. During the first period of Mr. Hamilton's administration he showed great business capacity, and it could not be said that he had even done anything which could be said to be dishonest. That position he occupied until Mr. Macalister went home as Agent-General. During his (Mr. Douglas's) administration of office a change was made in connection with the executive engineer. It was found that Mr. Ashwell—who had always done his work very well, and from whom they had always obtained excellent material, in which he was honourably distinguished from his predecessor—was obtaining a very large income in the shape of commission; and the Minister of Works for the time being recommended that instead of the executive engineer receiving his emoluments from commission he should receive a fixed salary. The Agent-General was therefore instructed to dispense with Mr. Ashwell's services as consulting engineer on commission, and engage another consulting engineer on a fixed salary of £800 a-year. He (Mr. Douglas) never dreamed that Mr. Ashwell would accept the subordinate position on a sum much less than he had been making, but to his astonishment he accepted it, on the appointment of Mr. Macalister. That appointment was made subject to the approval of the Executive, and he must take the responsibility of having approved of it; but he must confess that he felt some surprise that Mr. Ashwell was content to occupy the same position, as he had been previously earning a much larger sum by commission.

The PREMIER: No.

Mr. DOUGLAS: It certainly appeared that Mr. Ashwell was making £2,000 a-year.

The PREMIER: You have not examined the accounts.

Mr. DOUGLAS said the accounts were before them at the time, and that was the conclusion at which the then Minister for Works also arrived. However, Mr. Ashwell went to the office, and he could quite understand that Mr. Macalister, finding he could do a good deal of work with Mr. Ashwell independently of Mr. Hamilton, the latter gentleman did not feel in the same independent position as before. At all events, disagreements and uncomfortable relations arose between the Agent-General and Mr. Hamilton, and the consequence was that Mr. Hamilton was left pretty much to himself. There was no doubt a growing influence of another kind, in connection with Messrs. McIlwraith, McEacharn, and Company. He was justified in inferring that McIlwraith, McEacharn, and Company, in connection with Mr. Ashwell, had a great deal of influence in the London office, and had probably also a great deal of confidence placed in them by the Agent-General. He had also arrived at the conclusion that they abused that confidence. That might be considered a brief summary of the history of the London office, and his theory with

regard to the late unpleasant relations between Mr. Hamilton and the Agent-General. Mr. Macalister, no doubt, did not enjoy good health, and on that account—like Mr. Daintree—was very willing that the work should be done by others, when he could find men who would undertake the responsibility. He did not hit it off very well with Mr. Hamilton, and the consequence was that a great deal of the work devolved upon Mr. Ashwell, who commanded the wires in the London office. He had contrasted the inquiry into the working of the London office by the Premier with that which was held by Mr. Macalister in 1876, and he could not but conclude that the latter was much more complete and satisfactory. In His Excellency's instructions to Mr. McIlwraith, dated the 2nd October, 1879, it was provided that he should, after visiting America, devote his particular attention to the management of the Agent-General's office, including a full audit of the accounts and an investigation into the system of carrying out the immigration regulations, inclusive of the employment of agents. It was somewhat remarkable that, while the Premier received no instructions under un-Executive authority to buy railway material, he was distinctly instructed to inquire into the office management, and to secure an audit of the accounts. When the Premier reached England, one of the first letters put into his hand informed him that he would find things very uncomfortable in the London office, and that oil and water could be more easily made to mingle than the Agent-General and Mr. Hamilton. Subsequently he received another letter, and in the end Mr. Ashwell tendered his resignation, which was accepted. Instead of the Premier undertaking any special inquiry, he allowed things to drift on, and expressed his surprise to the Agent-General that the Agent-General and Mr. Hamilton were not on speaking terms, and he intimated to Mr. Macalister on one occasion that if he would not put Mr. Hamilton in his place he (the Premier) would himself do so. What followed did not exactly transpire, but there was certainly no inquiry into the working of the Agent-General's office. According to the papers it did not appear that he made any audit. The hon. gentleman knew from Mr. Ashwell that the relations between Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Macalister were very unsatisfactory, and yet nothing of a definite character was done until this business of the steel rails turned up. And that appeared to him to be the weak point of the whole affair. Why did the hon. gentleman, knowing as he did the condition of the office and the unpleasant relations between these two men, allow Mr. Hamilton to continue in his position? He might even have left England without making any inquiry had it not been for the revelations with regard to the steel rails business; for it appeared that the arrangements for leaving England were made before the disclosures took place in connection with the steel rails. Therefore, it appeared that the inquiry was not made until at the last moment, when it was forced on the Premier, and when a letter to the Agent-General necessitated it. It was not necessary for him to dilate further upon the subject; the committee, by their double report, had very clearly summarised the view taken by them of the working of the London office, and he believed it could not have been more ably done. He had considered it his duty to point to the fact, as the most unsatisfactory feature of the whole case, that the hon. gentleman having been commissioned to make an inquiry did not make that inquiry until he was obliged to do so, and having commenced the inquiry failed to prosecute it to its legitimate conclusion. In

failing to do that he had thrust upon this House the responsibility of doing that which he might have done. Referring to that subject the hon. gentleman had stated that he was not a policeman or a detective, and in connection with the investigation of the business in which the Barrow Company was concerned, the hon. gentleman had stated that when he came to a certain point he was snubbed by Mr. Haslam, and he refused to go any further. The hon. gentleman was not a policeman or a detective; he was something very much more than either—he was the trusted servant and the representative in England of the people of Queensland. Having at that time got a clue to a series of transactions which required further investigation he refused point-blank to follow them up, on the ground that having been snubbed by the managing director of the Haslam Engineering Company he could not undertake to be snubbed again. In such a case he (Mr. Douglas) should have considered it to be his duty to submit to any amount of contumely in order that he might get to the bottom of such an affair. The hon. gentleman, however, did not attempt to make even the inquiries that Mr. Haslam himself had indicated; he did not write to the managing clerk of the Haslam Engineering Company, as suggested, in order to ascertain what the nature of the company was. Having been snubbed, he said he might be snubbed by the Barrow or Moss Bay Company if he presumed to make any further inquiry. That seemed to be a point which was very unsatisfactory. The Premier, who was the highest authority in connection with the Government, and to whom was confided the duty of making an investigation, in this very direction refused to Mr. Hamilton the independent inquiry which Mr. Hamilton demanded, closed the other inquiry abruptly and before there was any necessity to close it, for there was ample time to make inquiry before his departure, and declined to depute his authority for that purpose to anyone else, and dismissed Mr. Hamilton. Whatever might have been the relations between Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Macalister, it did not seem to him that Mr. Hamilton should have been treated in that way. Mr. Macalister might have been justified in suspending Mr. Hamilton on a previous occasion; the Premier would certainly have been justified in suspending him on that occasion, after the preliminary inquiry; but an opportunity should certainly have been given to Mr. Hamilton of pressing the inquiry further, and he should have been allowed the independent inquiry which he demanded. That would have been only fair to Mr. Hamilton and fair to the colony, and would have saved a great deal of trouble—but it was not done. Under those circumstances it was possible—perhaps probable—that Mr. Hamilton felt somewhat vindictive. He had served the colony—he believed faithfully—for some years: he had been placed in an important position, requiring the exercise of business talents; he had shown that he possessed those business talents. Under those circumstances it did not seem that Mr. Hamilton deserved summary dismissal without appeal. No doubt he did his best to show up the Premier, and he (Mr. Douglas) had no doubt that Mr. Hamilton was the prime mover—possibly the originator—of the Hemmant petition. Hence all this trouble that had come about. It was quite possible that Mr. Hamilton might have displayed a certain amount of vindictiveness; but he (Mr. Douglas) could not help feeling that the hon. gentleman at the head of the Government had treated Mr. Hamilton in a very sharp peremptory manner, leaving no hope that the case would be reconsidered, if on further inquiry it should be ascertained that Mr.

Hamilton was not so much in the wrong as had been represented. It was evident to his mind that the real criminal was not Mr. Hamilton. Some one yet unknown was no doubt at the bottom of the transaction by which Andrew McIlwraith bought 30,000 tons of rails. In this respect he (Mr. Douglas) differed from the hon. member for North Brisbane. He thought the evidence was sufficient to show that Mr. McIlwraith did purchase those rails, and that his purchase was based chiefly upon information received from here that, as indicated in the telegram of the Colonial Secretary, a large quantity of rails would be wanted. It was a hazardous and dangerous speculation; but men were to be found bold enough to enter into such speculations, and it was quite possible that Andrew McIlwraith was one of them. He did not think Mr. McIlwraith would have done so if he had not been very sure of his ground and known all the ins-and-outs of the office—in fact, not unless he had received information from the London office which enabled him to do it. He ought never to have received that information; and the colony ought not to have been made the victim—in one sense—of his transactions. He (Mr. Douglas) did not mean to say that the lowest price was not obtained—he believed it was the lowest price at the time; but whether it was necessary to buy 15,000 tons at the time was another matter altogether. That was a matter of discretion, and he did not intend to impugn the discretion of the Government in that respect. They had a certain right to exercise, and they exercised it; and Andrew McIlwraith, representing McIlwraith, McEacharn and Company, availed himself of the opportunity of making a bold speculation, and, feeling secure of his ground in the Queensland Government office, felt that he could do so with impunity and safety. This transaction should not have been carried out, and would not have been carried out if a more careful watch had been kept. The Premier himself seemed to have conceived a most exalted idea of his position as Premier in England. He appeared at the Barrow and the Moss Bay Companies' Works as the Premier of Queensland. He did not consider it was his duty to make inquiries with regard to rails being manufactured there. He learned that they were being rolled for the Queensland Government, and that the price was a remarkably low one, but he apparently considered it beneath his dignity to make any inquiry as to what the price was. He no doubt knew that they were being manufactured on behalf of Messrs. McIlwraith, McEacharn, and Company, who had availed themselves of the agency of the company to obtain rails to be afterwards supplied to the Queensland Government. At any rate, he might have found that out, and he might also have found out whether, as asserted by Mr. Hamilton, these rails had been bought on the credit of the Queensland Government. That they were bought for Queensland was admitted, but it was not proved whether they were bought by McIlwraith, McEacharn, and Company on their own credit or on the credit of the Government of Queensland. If the latter, the fact might have been easily ascertained from the Barrow or Moss Bay Company. And in that case, the course which the Premier would have been bound to take was this—he ought to have offered to pay the money direct, as the representative of the Queensland Government and the contractor. If they were rolled for the Queensland Government on the credit of the Queensland Government, even though it might be through the agency of McIlwraith, McEacharn and Co., it was his duty in the high position of trust in which he was

placed, to have said: "I will take your rails at the price you are getting;" and he ought at once to have thrown over the bargain with Mr. Haslam, and thrown upon his firm the responsibility of proving, in court, the nature of the transaction between themselves and the Queensland Government. The Premier had, however, taken another course, which he said he considered was sufficient, though he (Mr. Douglas) did not think it was. The suspension of Mr. Hamilton might have been, under the circumstances, justifiable; but the denial of an independent inquiry, and the refusal to push the inquiry on further, showed that the Premier had not a due conception of his privileges, rights, and duties as guardian of the interests of the country. The precipitate and unjust action of the Premier had resulted in the possibly vindictive action of Mr. Hamilton; but he saw nothing in the inquiry which led him to infer that Mr. Hamilton was a dishonest man, or that he did not do the work of the Government, during the period in which responsibilities were entrusted to him, honestly and faithfully. It must be admitted—it was admitted—that under certain circumstances Mr. Hamilton had accepted commissions; but the circumstances were very exceptional. In order to secure freights for ships sailing from Glasgow he undertook to perform business for Smellie and Company which he should have avoided altogether; but, on the whole, Mr. Hamilton had shown himself to be a credible man.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: No.

Mr. DOUGLAS said he thought Mr. Hamilton had been, though he must couple that statement with an expression of regret that Mr. Hamilton should have allowed himself to accept a commission from any person in Brisbane. The Minister for Works had made a great deal of the conduct of Mr. Hamilton in not placing the information which he had obtained into the hands of the Government; but what did the charges in that respect amount to? In the particular case stated—that of Messrs. Law and Co., Messrs. Taylor, Bethel, and Co., and Messrs. McIlwraith, McEacharn and Co.—it might have been better if Mr. Hamilton had tendered his resignation, feeling that he could not exercise his discretion as he should like to have done. At the same time, it was stated that he felt uncomfortable in seeing such things going on, but did not consider that the transactions justified him in laying information against the Agent-General. The Minister for Works indeed had in his remarks last night furnished proof, as he thought, that the Agent-General had exercised a wise discretion in the very cases to which Mr. Hamilton took exception. The real truth was not, however, that Mr. Hamilton took exception to any particular act, but that, feeling he was not in the confidence of the Agent-General, and that others were, he declined to commit himself to any course of action for which he was not entirely responsible. He (Mr. Douglas) did not think it was very fair of the hon. gentleman to go back to old times, with respect to Mr. Hamilton's transactions with the Colonial Secretary's office during Mr. Daintree's reign. The action of Mr. Hamilton was no doubt peculiar. He was sent as a trusted and confidential agent to ascertain the condition of the London office, and he did not find it satisfactory. He did not report officially, but he reported, as instructed, to the Colonial Secretary for the time being. That was an exceptional course; but it should be remembered that the circumstances were exceptional. Mr. Wheeler was dismissed; he had been deemed up to that time to be an honest man. He (Mr. Douglas) believed so, but it was clearly proved, not only that Mr. Wheeler was a dishonest man, but also that Mr. Daintree's health was such as to render him incapable of discharging his functions properly. Mr. Hamilton discharged very unpleasant duties satisfactorily for some years, and not a word was said against him. He acted as Agent-General for some months—he believed nearly a year—and no complaint was made.

The PREMIER: You condemned him strongly yourself.

Mr. DOUGLAS said he was not aware of having done so. It was believed that Mr. Hamilton discharged those duties efficiently, and it seemed hard on him to go back to old times for proof of the want of credibility which, in the opinion of the Minister for Works, was to be attached to everything Mr. Hamilton said or did. In his (Mr. Douglas') opinion Mr. Hamilton was an honest man, who had acted to the best of his ability when placed in exceptionally difficult circumstances, and who would not commit himself to any action which he believed was not justified in fairplay. He had shown that transactions had been going on under his nose which were not consistent with fairplay or sound business principles. Mr. Hamilton had often been spoken of as a disgraced and discredited public servant, but there was nothing that had taken place during his term of office in London to justify such statements with regard to him. But even from disgraced and discredited public servants things were often heard which it was very desirable should be known, and it was not right to say that Mr. Hamilton was discredited and disgraced until it was seen whether what he had stated could be proved. He would draw the attention of the House to a somewhat similar matter which had occurred in connection with the office in London of the Agent-General for South Australia. The transactions he referred to appeared to be of an even more equivocal character than those under consideration, and they had been carried out in a most extraordinary way. He referred to the case because it was desirable that the House should know of the things which were perpetrated in the iron trade. It appeared that some three years ago Mr. Bassett Richards was employed as inspector of some rails which were being manufactured in Cardiff for the South Australian Government, and he informed the Agent-General that all sorts of rubbish were going into the rails. He was at once discredited, and Sir Arthur Bligh, the Agent-General, refused to believe anything said by a dismissed inspector. But the dismissed inspector was not satisfied with that intimation from the Agent-General, and he wrote direct to Mr. Morgan, the Chief Secretary, in Adelaide, informing him. The Chief Secretary's attention having been drawn to the matter, and the rails having in the meantime arrived, a careful inspection was made, the result of which was that the whole of the cargo was condemned as being not up to the specification. The rails were probably the greatest rubbish that had ever been sent out, and yet they were supplied by a firm supposed at one time to have been of very high standing—Messrs. Hopkins, Gilkes, and Company, of Cardiff, South Wales. The Chief Secretary having had his attention drawn to the condition of the rails which had arrived, the matter was referred back to Sir Arthur Bligh, who before would not listen to the report; and the matter was put into the hands of Messrs. Freshfields and Williams, a competent firm of solicitors. The result of the investigation that followed was that a series of desperate frauds in connection with the manufacture of rails was disclosed. Messrs. Freshfields and Williams commenced an inquiry on the authority of the Agent-General in September, 1878, and corresponded with their agents at Cardiff, Messrs. Luard and Shirley,

who made an inquiry. The following was a statement of what they found:—

"We must say we were amazed at some of the revelations Richards made to us. According to him, Messrs. Hopkins and Co., instead of making the whole of the rails for this contract from pig-iron of a uniform quality, had (say) 10 per cent. of good pig-iron and 90 per cent. of bad. They systematically produced, roughly speaking, 10 per cent. of the order of good rails, and these were commonly called in the works 'test rails.' The whole of the rails, *i.e.*, the whole 100 per cent., were placed on benches in tiers, and the small quantity of 'test rails' were placed in such a position about the centre of the parcel as to attract the inspector, and the inspector was gently led up to this part of the parcel so that he might select some of these 'test rails' for the purpose of testing.

"If the inspector on any particular morning evinced an indisposition to be led to this particular place, and chose rails from what we call the 90 per cent. and directed some of them to be tested, he was immediately decoyed away in the direction of the testing-house, which was 300 or 400 yards off, and the men were told not to take to the testing-house the particular rails which the inspector had expressed his desire to have tested, but some of the others, or 'test rails.'

"When the inspection had been going on for some time, Mr. Willis, the inspector, said more than once to Richards that he was very much dissatisfied with the rails, for even some of those which he had tested broke in the test, and that he had a good mind to reject the whole. But he never did so.

"Later on it would seem as if Mr. Willis must have entertained some suspicions that the rails which he selected for testing were kept back and other ones surreptitiously brought to the test-house in lieu of them, for he had made a stamp in order that he might stamp those which he required to have tested. This stamp was, Richards says, in shape very much like an ordinary iron chisel. It was about three or four inches long, and instead of having a sharp point as a chisel has at the end, it had there a stamp which, when impressed upon anything produced the initials 'W. D.,' being the initials, we believe, of Mr. Dempsey, the engineer.

"Mr. Willis, the inspector, carried this stamp about with him, and when he desired to have any particular rail tested, instead of marking with a piece of chalk as he had previously done, he adopted the plan of having the W. D. impressed by means of this stamp upon the rail. The operation was one that could be done in a few seconds by a workman with proper tools, *viz.*, a good strong hammer.

"It would seem almost as if the foreman at the works at this point of the case felt as if he was being outmatched; but he was equal to the occasion, for immediately this new practice was introduced by Mr. Willis, orders were given to take an impression in lead from the W. D. which had been stamped on one of the rails by Mr. Willis' orders, and by means of this impression to produce what we may, without exaggeration, describe as a counterfeit of Mr. Williams' stamp. This counterfeit was kept by the chief foreman, and was given out every morning to Richards, and Richards' instructions were that when Mr. Willis had put his own stamp of W. D. upon any particular rail, in order that it might be sent to the test-house, he (Richards) was immediately, by means of this counterfeit stamp, to impress the letters W. D. upon one of the 'test-rails,' and send these latter to the test-house, instead of the one which Mr. Willis had himself stamped."

The Mr. Dempsey mentioned was, he might state, at one time an engineer in the employ of the Queensland Government. There was a sample of the sort of transactions which had been going on, and yet this discredited inspector could not be believed when he made the truth known. The Agent-General would not believe him until the rails had actually been sent out to South Australia, and some of them had been sent back in order to be tested. This conveyed a lesson to this colony, and he drew attention to it because he thought the engineers and leading men of the colony should know the sort of practices they had to combat, and should not be too ready to discredit gentlemen who were called dismissed public servants. Mr. Richards, further on, made an affirmation, in which he described the operations carried on at the works as follows:—

"During the whole of the time I was employed at Hopkins and Co.'s yard (and that was about six months)

we were engaged on these rails for the South Australian Government. I think they had started rolling a day or two before I went to the works.

"The rails were, in the first instance, manufactured by Hopkins, Gilkes, and Co. To do this they used (of course) pig iron; but they did not make all the rails from the same sort of pig iron.

"They made a small portion (certainly not so much as five per cent.) from better pig iron than the rest. Some of the 'pig' was made, I believe, into what is called 'Danks Bloom,' but I very seldom went into the mill. The 'Danks Bloom' (if I am right in the name) was made into what were called 'test rails.' They were known by this name by the workmen generally.

"* * * * *

"Of the six hundred rails on each bench I should say there were not more than fifteen or twenty at the outside of 'test rails;' the others were all made from the inferior pig iron. On more occasions than one Mr. Lester, the manager, said to me, 'I hope, Richards, the test rails are placed all right in the tiers,'

"There were two inspectors there almost every day. Their names were Mr. Willis and Mr. Mc—I understood they had been draughtsmen in Mr. Dempsey's office. Mr. Dempsey was the engineer employed by the South Australian Government.

"Mr. Willis usually came to the works about 9 or 10 o'clock in the morning to test and inspect the rails that had been turned out during the previous twenty-four hours. The work of making the rails went on by night as well as by day.

"Mr. Willis usually went up to one of the benches on which the rails were laid, as I have before described, accompanied either by Mr. Jones, the sub-contractor, or by Rosser Davies, the foreman or inspector of Messrs. Hopkins, Gilkes, and Co. They would say to him, 'Do you propose testing any rails to-day, Mr. Willis?' Sometimes he would say 'Yes,' and sometimes 'No.'

"If Mr. Willis decided to test any rails on that particular day, Mr. Jones or Mr. Rosser Davies would quietly guide (or lead) him up to that part of the bench where the test rails were placed, and would say, 'These are pretty cold, Mr. Willis. Will you have some of these tested?' The inspector would probably say 'Yes,' and thereupon he would mark by a cross in chalk, at the end of the rails, those he wished to have taken to the testing-place. If he happened to mark none but test rails, some of the men would immediately draw out of the rack or tier those which he had marked, and carry them to the testing-house, which was 300 or 400 yards distant from the benches, and these rails would then and there be tested; but if Mr. Willis had happened to put his chalk mark upon any that were not test rails, one of the men, acting under Jones' orders, would immediately thereupon make a similar mark upon one of the test rails, and carry it (instead of the rail actually marked by the inspector) to the test-house for the purpose of being tested, and the inspector would not discover what had been done.

"Another plan adopted in the works for deceiving the inspector was, to pass the rails over an iron pan full of hot cinders run out from the balling furnace of the mill. If the first one or two rails taken to the testing-house gave way under the test, the practice was to take the subsequent ones about to be tested to this iron pan, and there heat the middle of the rail. This would take perhaps five minutes: a rail when hot will bear a much heavier test than when it is cold. I am quite sure Mr. Willis did not know that the rails had been just heated as I have described.

"By all this I solemnly mean to say and declare that the men acting under orders deliberately and systematically deceived the inspector, and led him to think the test was being applied to the rails which he had marked, and that they were as cool as when he had marked them, whilst in point of fact it was really applied to another rail—altogether, that is to say, to one of the test rails, which were of a better quality, and even some of these had been artificially heated.

"When the rails were being placed on the benches prior to their being seen by the inspector, I have often heard Rosser Davies say to the men, 'Now then, let's have some test bars, let's put them here,' pointing to a certain place, and thereupon fifteen or twenty test rails would be put among twenty times that number of inferior rails on one of the benches to await inspection by the inspector.

"It seemed to me sometimes as if Mr. Willis' suspicions were aroused, for he would say to me, 'These rails are not what they ought to be; I have a good mind to reject the whole lot of them.' But he did not do so. I used to say to him in reply, 'You should adhere to what is in the specification.' I wonder he did not reject the whole of them, for even some of the test rails would not stand the test. I have known even them break whilst being tested. The inspector, how-

ever, when this happened, only rejected the particular rail, and not the entire parcel or benchful from which it was taken.

"The phrase 'test bars,' or test rails, was one in common use in the yard; there was no secret about it. Everybody knew what was meant by the words, 'test rails.'"

There was a great deal in the paper really worthy of notice, and a copy of it ought to be obtained by the Engineer-in-Chief and others connected with the ordering of the railway materials. The paper was numbered 163 of the South Australian Parliamentary papers. The company, which had held a high position in the iron world, had to succumb to circumstances. They might have been prosecuted criminally, but as they were a limited company the South Australian Government thought it better to come to terms with them, and they did so—the company giving the Government £20,000. The Government certainly went to an expense of £5,000 to secure the money, but an extraordinary part of the affair was that they got the money and the rails in addition. Some of the rails were now being laid on the Port Augusta line. A more extraordinary thing than all, perhaps, was the fact that the South Australian Government had occasionally sold some of the rails at an absolute profit on the original price. The Government had no doubt made money out of the frightful swindle, but their experiences ought to put the officers of the Queensland Government on their guard. Mr. Rendel, an engineer who examined some of the rails returned from South Australia, reported to the Agent-General as follows:—

"All the rails which I examined in company with Mr. Price Williams were defective in some particular or other to such an extent that no manufacturer should have offered them to a customer purchasing under your client's specification."

There was a great deal of amusing matter in the document, showing how the test rails were supplied and how the inspectors were duped. The document ought certainly to be sent to the engineer who tested rails for this colony. He hoped that the rails which were being sent here were not of the same character; but it would be just as well to have some of them tested, as they really did not know into whose hands they might get. In connection with the subject he would take exception to some remarks made by the Minister for Works, who seemed to conceive that it was a sound transaction on their part to accept a contract from anybody who chose to tender. To him one of the most objectionable features connected with the whole business was the acceptance of the offer of the Haslam Company even though it was the lowest. The Agent-General had pointed out both to the Premier and to the previous Government that it was not desirable to deal with Ibbotson Brothers because they were not rail makers but speculators. The Haslam Company were in an exactly similar position. Mr. Ashwell, in a letter, brought under the notice of the Agent-General and the Premier, perhaps not intentionally, the fact that this company were not manufacturers. Mr. Ashwell might not have reported against the firm, but he unquestionably stated his opinion that it was undesirable to enter into contracts with speculators. It seemed to him (Mr. Douglas) quite clear, and it ought to be manifest to any man of common-sense, that a material element in such a bargain was the character of the men with whom they were dealing. The character of the material which they had hitherto received had been most excellent, but that was chiefly owing to the fact that they had dealt with responsible people, who had supplied what they required on special specification. He could quite conceive that under some circumstances it would be infinitely better to give a higher price for what they wanted, if they got the material from people

whom they knew, than it would be to go into the open market and buy from people who might have no character. The theory propounded by the Minister for Works seemed to him to prove more than anything else the incapacity of the hon. member to administer the office which he held. The Minister stated on the previous night that it was right that they should throw open their contracts to the whole world, and he illustrated his contention by referring to Mr. Hemmant, who enjoyed a special right in the particular branch of industry with which he was connected. The Minister stamped on his mind the conviction that he did not possess those qualities which ought to be possessed by a gentleman holding such an office, when he argued that the mere fact that a tenderer was the lowest justified them in accepting the tender irrespective of all other considerations. No more fatal doctrine could be propounded.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS: I wish to correct the hon. gentleman. What I said was—

"And if anyone had been lower than the Haslam Company he was confident they would have been entitled to the contract if they could have supplied sufficient proof to the engineer and to the Agent-General that they could supply rails made from a superior class of ore."

Mr. DOUGLAS said the hon. member amplified that considerably. He did not wish to say that the Haslam Company were a discredited firm, but they had never dealt with them before on the scale which they were now doing; and both the Agent-General and Mr. Ashwell had pointed out that it was desirable to deal directly with the manufacturers and not with speculators.

THE PREMIER: Never. Quote Mr. Macalister's words. Refer to page 53, and see if you will find anything there about dealing with makers only.

Mr. DOUGLAS said that Mr. Macalister had been in correspondence with the Government on a previous occasion respecting the previous offer of Mr. Thomassen, and he pointed out to the Government of which he was a member that it was not desirable to deal with Ibbotson Brothers because they were not manufacturers.

THE PREMIER: His words are to the effect that Ibbotson Brothers act for a company who do not possess any ore of their own, but import Spanish and other inferior classes of ore.

Mr. DOUGLAS said that in a telegram dated 23rd December, 1879, the Agent-General said—

"Impossible to say whether Ibbotson's offer is advantageous or otherwise without trying market. I don't regard Ibbotsons as makers."

THE PREMIER: Read the letter of the same date.

Mr. DOUGLAS said he would read a portion of the letter, as follows:—

"Another point to which I would wish to draw your attention is the fact that Messrs. Ibbotson are not themselves makers of rails, and are acting for the Ebbw Vale Co., a company who do not possess ores of their own, but import Spanish and other inferior classes of ores, and are thus placed at a great disadvantage as to quality of material."

THE PREMIER: That is the objection.

Mr. DOUGLAS said it did not appear that the Haslam Company were possessed of ores. There was no proof of it, and the presumption was that they were not. They knew as a fact that the rails which were coming from the Moss Bay Company and the Barrow Company were not made of Haslam Company's ore, but of Barrow Company's ore.

THE MINISTER FOR WORKS: It is Cumberland ore.

Mr. DOUGLAS said if the rails which were coming were of good material it was their good

fortune that Messrs. Andrew McIlwraith and Ashwell had bought them. He would do Mr. Ashwell the credit of saying that throughout he had acted up to the principles of his profession as an honourable man; he had always seen that they got good material, and he dared say that in this instance he was doing the same thing;—but that did not alter the fact that if through his giving information, or by any action of his, Messrs. McIlwraith and Company secured the contract, the transaction was not a legitimate one, and it deserved to be exposed. If that could be proved, and Mr. Ashwell were still in the employ of the Government, he (Mr. Douglas) presumed that he would be dismissed notwithstanding all he had done for them previously. Having referred to all these matters, he had very little more to say. He must confess that he regretted that the Minister for Works wound up his speech as he did. The hon. member commenced very fairly and reciprocated the moderate tone of the hon. member for North Brisbane, but he did not maintain that throughout. The hon. member warmed up, unjustifiably, when he said that it was not fair for hon. members opposite to make Mr. Hamilton a tool to carry out their malignant intentions as far as the Premier was concerned. He regretted that the hon. member applied those terms to hon. members on that side of the House. They had no malignant intentions and had shown none towards the Premier. They had shown what he considered a justifiable warmth, as the disclosures which were made at the commencement of the session were of an unparalleled character—altogether unprecedented in their history. If there was nothing fraudulent in the transactions, they disclosed the greatest incapacity on the part of the Government to administer the affairs of the colony rightly or to the satisfaction of the people. The gross incapacity displayed in the first instance by the Minister for Works in his dealings with that scamp Thomassen was utterly unjustifiable. Then the Premier had shown a want of administrative ability when he went to London charged to make an inquiry into the working of the Agent-General's Office, and failed to do so up to the last moment, and also in declining to proceed with an inquiry into charges impugning the honesty of someone in the office, on the ground that he was not deputed to make such inquiries. In these respects the Premier displayed a want of administrative capacity which had justified a great deal of what had been said. There had no doubt been a large amount of warm feeling. He knew that at times he had felt warm; but on referring back to what was said by the hon. member for North Brisbane and himself, he could not find a single sentence which justified the construction put upon the hearing of the Opposition at an early period of the session. He never felt any personal malignity towards the Premier; he had felt a warm feeling of regret and of distaste at the fact that the high position of the Premier had been called into question as it had been. What had happened was mainly owing to the Premier's own conduct in the matter—his want of perception of what was required from a man placed in his position. He wished now to say a few words in connection with the ship contracts with which the Premier and Colonial Secretary were connected. He had more than once referred to them, and when he did it was said he was anticipating a matter which was still *sub judice*. He entirely repudiated the statement. He was not sure that he could concur in the opinion expressed by anyone on the subject. The committee stated in their report that they thought the Premier and the Colonial Secretary were not contractors, and in paragraph 27 they gave their reason for arriving at that conclusion.

Whatever might be the opinion of the committee, they ought not to have conveyed it as they had done. He observed from the draft report brought before the committee that the chairman was of opinion that, as the matter was *sub judice*, no expression of opinion should be given by the committee. In that he entirely differed from the chairman. He thought the committee ought to have given expression to the opinion that there was a *prima facie* case for the consideration of the Elections and Qualifications Committee. That was the only tribunal which could try such a case. He did not consider that the case, as concerned the privileges of the House, was before the Supreme Court. The question of penalties which would be dealt with by the court was altogether distinct from the issue as to whether the hon. gentlemen named were qualified to hold their seats. He had previously expressed the opinion that it was the duty of the House, by resolution or otherwise, to remit the question to the Committee of Elections and Qualifications.

The PREMIER: Why did you not petition?

Mr. DOUGLAS said that he did not consider that part of his duty. It would have been quite within the functions of the select committee to recommend that such a course should be adopted. As things were put before them, there was a *prima facie* case for investigation if for nothing else. He would repeat that no decision of the Supreme Court on the question of penalties would ever decide whether the Premier or the Colonial Secretary were disqualified from holding their seats. To his mind the mode of procedure was made clear by the 21st clause of the Legislative Assembly Act, dealing with the Elections and Qualifications Committee. The clause said—

"The said committee shall have power to inquire into and determine upon all election petitions, and upon all questions which may be referred to them by the Assembly respecting the validity of any election or return of any member to serve in the Assembly, whether the dispute relating to such election or return arise out of an error in the return of the returning officer, or out of the allegation of bribery or corruption against any person concerned in any election, or out of any other allegation calculated to affect the validity of such election or return, and also upon all questions concerning the qualification or disqualification of any person who shall have been returned as a member of the Assembly."

The committee judged in good conscience, and it appeared to him that they ought to be called upon to determine whether the hon. members were qualified to hold their seats. No decision which they could arrive at would affect the decision of the Supreme Court, and no decision which the Supreme Court could arrive at would affect the decision of the committee. The committee was the legal tribunal of the House, but he thought it would be far better if the Supreme Court was the tribunal. Before concluding, he must say that the papers relating to the inquiry had been laid before them in a most disgraceful way. If anyone wished to confuse the matter they could not have confused it more than it was by the way in which the papers were compiled. They were jumbled up in all directions, and it was difficult to make out the sequels to them. It was the duty of the Minister to see that the papers were printed in a readable and understandable form. It was customary that the papers should be brought under the notice of the Minister and an abstract of them attached to the frontispiece, by which means a consecutive idea of what they contained could be obtained. There were some other points on which he should like to express his opinion, but he did not wish to detain the House by doing so. He was glad to think that the matter was to be dealt with in a way which would bring them to a final decision.

He wished to repudiate emphatically any personal feeling of hostility to either the Premier or the Colonial Secretary, who might imagine that he had personal dislike to them apart from public business. He had not the slightest feeling of the kind. He had felt strongly, and he thought justifiably, about their malversation of office, and whatever his criticisms had been they had been intended to apply to them in their official capacity—not as to the men. In any further comments he might make on the subject he should endeavour to keep that in mind. He would not shrink from definitely expressing his opinion on any subject, however unpalatable it might be; he would endeavour to make the expression of his opinions as little unpalatable as possible, but he would not shrink from giving his opinion if he believed that the public might benefit by it. He thought the public would benefit by the large amount of light which had been brought to bear upon this subject. It seemed to him to be right that the commencement of the investigation should be made here—in that respect he differed from the hon. member for North Brisbane. The inquiry must now be proceeded with elsewhere, and he hoped that the constitution of the commission might be somewhat of the character which he had described, and not that which was indicated by the Premier. He was quite sure that the appointment of one gentleman—whoever he might be, however high his character, and however desirous he might be to be thoroughly impartial—would not give satisfaction to both sides of the House. For that reason he thought it desirable that a representative from each side of the House should be appointed. Whether there were to be one, two, or three commissioners appointed in England was a matter of comparative unimportance. There might be either one or three appointed—at any rate it would not do to have an even number—but it seemed to him that a commission on such an important matter should be composed of either three or five gentlemen; if of three, two should be appointed from this colony. The whole question deserved a thorough exhaustive searching to its very depths, and whatever those depths were he hoped that the commission would arrive at a decision, and that that being done there would be an end to the controversy for ever.

MR. DICKSON said that after the able speech of the hon. member for Maryborough, containing as it did a suggestion as to the form of the proposed commission to be appointed to pursue the inquiry into this matter, he thought some members of the Ministry should have risen to express their opinion on the merits of the suggestion. He thought it was only due to the hon. member who made the suggestion, and to other members who he believed approved of it, that the Government should have expressed some approval or otherwise of it. He should have been better pleased to have spoken on the question in reply to some member of the Government, or some member from the other side, who might have answered the speech of the hon. member for Maryborough. After that hon. gentleman's able speech, and after the exhaustive speech of the leader of the Opposition, and the long speech of the hon. Minister for Works, he did not feel inclined to tire the House by going through the evidence, being convinced that no matter what further reference might be made to the question, or what further comments might be made on the evidence by hon. members, it would not assist them in arriving at any finality. They had all agreed that a further investigation should be pursued, and that steps should be taken by which such an investigation should be carried out in the best and most satisfactory manner—that a number of gentlemen should be

appointed possessing the necessary ability and all the qualifications which would enable them to pursue the investigation in England, supported by gentlemen appointed by the Colonial Office, so as to form an independent tribunal, relieved from the acrimony of local political feeling—by which the inquiry could be carried out to a finality in a satisfactory manner. He believed that such a tribunal should send in a report, and not merely take evidence, and that their report should be final, and should settle for ever a question which, he trusted, would be then removed altogether from the arena of that House. He thought it was desirable that when the commission at home had concluded their labours their report should have a finality, and should not in any way necessitate further references from both sides of the House to a matter, which he was sure they must all regret had ever appeared as a subject of discussion in their Assembly. As he had already stated, he did not intend to go into the evidence taken by the committee which was now before hon. members, and which had been quoted so fully by previous speakers. With certain portions of the report as originally brought up by the chairman he (Mr. Dickson) had quite agreed, and he took it that the whole of that draft report disclosed a desire on the part of the chairman to be strictly impartial and to relieve himself from the charge of favouring either party. He quite admitted the extreme difficulty of that hon. member's task, and he believed that in the original report he discharged his duty in such a way as to relieve himself from any charge of allowing his political proclivities to get the better of his judgment. He could only regret that the hon. member did not adhere to that report, as the one before the House was not the original report of the chairman, but was one with amendments introduced and carried by the Government or by their supporters, which were by no means an improvement on the original. If any hon. member would take the trouble to read the minutes of proceedings of the committee when the chairman's report was under discussion, he would see that there were several resolutions introduced by supporters of the Government which would, if carried, have rendered unnecessary any further investigation whatever over a large portion of the inquiry, but fortunately the chairman insisted that a further inquiry was rendered necessary by the disclosures already made. He thought, however, that it would be admitted by anyone, after a perusal of the amendments, that the chairman had acted almost entirely in favour of the views of the Government, which not only weakened the effect of his report, but also militated against the impression of impartiality which he (Mr. Dickson) had already stated was suggested on reading the original draft report. Again, the chairman whilst insisting on a further inquiry into this matter, which he believed had not been fully met by the inquiry here, should not have shrunk from suggesting the machinery by which that further inquiry should be made. In that respect he did not think the hon. member carried out his duty in connection with the committee to the extent that he ought to have done; inasmuch as the report of the chairman of the committee as to the matter in which the future inquiry was to be prosecuted might have, and no doubt would have, had great weight with hon. members in forming their opinion as to the constitution of the commission. However able any individual member of the community might be to pursue this inquiry at home, in conjunction with a gentleman appointed by the Imperial authorities—no matter whether he discharged his duties to his own satisfaction—he certainly would not do it to the satisfaction of any other person. This inquiry had assumed such a character that no one going home from the colony

would be credited by the losing side with having pursued his inquiry in a thoroughly correct spirit of impartiality; and therefore he thought it would be undesirable that any one gentleman should be placed in such a position. The suggestion made by the hon. member for Maryborough, that a member from each side of the House, assisted by either one or three gentlemen from the Colonial office, would certainly be a satisfactory body to continue the inquiry at home, and he was sure that their verdict would be received with much greater confidence and approval than would be the case if only one gentleman went home to act in conjunction with a gentleman appointed by the Colonial Office. He did not see why they should hesitate in giving expression to their opinions on such a subject, or in naming the gentlemen they considered best qualified to pursue the investigation at home. He had himself no hesitation in saying that the hon. Minister for Works would be well qualified to act, and also the hon. member for North Brisbane (Mr. Griffith), and he was sure that those hon. gentlemen, assisted by a gentleman from the Colonial Office, would in any report give entire satisfaction to the community. They had both devoted themselves most arduously to this important inquiry, and it had been no slight strain to those members of the committee who had attended the meetings regularly; they had steadily built up an edifice of evidence, and no men were better qualified than they were to pursue the inquiry to the end, having at their fingers' ends all the details. He agreed with the suggestion of the hon. member for Maryborough, and would record his opinion that such a selection as he had mentioned would be favourably received by the entire country. He was sure that hon. members opposite, if they felt themselves justified in giving expression to their feelings, without consulting the Government, would agree with the suggestion that had been made by the hon. member for Maryborough, and would say that, if adopted, it must be of great service to the colony, and that the gentlemen named by him would, by their labours at home, do good service to the colony. The debate on this question had been conducted with a great deal of moderation, and it was very gratifying to see that it had been so conducted, and that there had not been any attempt, at least to any extent, to disparage the character of the witnesses examined by the committee. The hon. Minister for Works had certainly shown some warmth in speaking of Mr. Hamilton; but the character of Mr. Hamilton had nothing whatever to do with this matter; no vilification of Mr. Hamilton could close their eyes to the real issue. All the House and the country had to do was to see whether there was any foundation for the statements made by Mr. Hemmant in his petition. He contended that the chairman of the committee, in insisting that the inquiry should be pursued at home, furnished a strong vindication of the letter addressed by Mr. Hamilton to Lord Kimberley; and the fact of the Government agreeing to such a further investigation was a strong justification of Mr. Hamilton's statement, and proved that some reality had been discovered in the statements made by Mr. Hamilton in his letter to Lord Kimberley. There was also every reason to believe that the storm which had been raised by Mr. Hamilton was likely to lead to some other results than were at first anticipated by the House. The hon. member for North Brisbane (Mr. Griffith) had most unmistakably shown that the allegations contained in Mr. Hemmant's petition, with the exception of one which could only be proved at home, had been maintained, and it must be a satisfaction to his hon. friend to know that the House had considered the matter of such importance as to require a further inquiry. He was sure that the country was

under a deep debt of gratitude to the hon. member for North Brisbane, who at the commencement of the session had had to stand the large amount of insult, of indignity, and contumely which was hurled against him, and who, in the midst of a pitiless storm of invective, pursued his course of inquiry into this matter, and had now placed it in such a form that even members of the Government had become alive to the necessity of continuing the inquiry at home. Whether that course should have been substituted for the inquiry here in the first place it was not necessary to discuss, but the inquiry here had formed a foundation on which the future superstructure of the inquiry would rest; and he trusted hon. gentlemen opposite would see the necessity of giving further satisfaction to the colony by accepting the suggestions of the hon. member for Maryborough. He had intended to show how the original report of the chairman had been modified by the members of the committee who were Government supporters, but it was unnecessary for him to do so, as he believed that no amount of discussion or debate would alter the opinions entertained on both sides of the House. He had also stated that he believed that the original report of the chairman was one which dealt more impartially with the matter than the report which was now before the House, and he regretted, therefore, that the chairman did not adhere to his own report, which would have had the effect of showing hon. members that it was framed entirely independent of any bearings either to one side or the other; and hon. members would have regarded it as an attempt to deal with this question independently of any party feeling. They had heard from the Minister for Works a considerable amount of comment on Mr. Hamilton, but he could only regret the hon. gentleman had not devoted his time, instead, to answering the questions on which so much of the evidence depended;—it was a question which, had it been properly answered at first by the hon. gentleman, might have saved all this trouble—namely, why the hon. gentleman did not insist upon Mr. Thomassen's agreement being either confirmed or annulled by cablegram from Ibbotson Brothers. That was where all the trouble arose. Had the Minister insisted upon that being done before Thomassen's agreement was concluded, the Premier would have had a clear field before him, or, at any rate, the whole thing would have been narrowed to a clearly distinct issue, and many matters that had tended to obscure would have been removed. That this view of the matter was the correct one was proved by the action of the Premier at home, for when Thomassen met him at Queenstown and Liverpool with an offer for rails, he said, "Before I do anything I must have a letter from your firm with regard to your offer to my colleague, either confirming or renouncing it." That was the proper course for a business man to have followed; and had the Minister for Works so done a great deal of trouble and a large amount of uncertainty would have been avoided. He had intended at the outset of his remarks to have gone into the clauses of the report; but seeing that no Minister had replied to the suggestion of the hon. member for Maryborough, he should simply content himself by referring to one part of the speech of the Minister for Works, where the hon. gentleman was in error. The hon. gentleman, towards the conclusion of his remarks, when dealing with the question of freight, as referred to in the protest, said:—

"The statement in clause 31 was utterly absurd. In clause 33 it was said—

"This price is largely in excess of the average freights previously paid by the Queensland Government."

"He said that it was not. The statements in the report on the same point were fully borne out, he mani-

tained. The price was not excessive when they took it into account that this tender was made for full-cargo ships. In clause 36 he noticed the following statement:—

"In two instances, which were specially brought under our notice, the 'Rothsay Bay' and the 'Tiverton,' it appears that they chartered the ships to carry full cargoes of rails to Brisbane at 30s., and a sum equal to about 35s. 3d. a-ton, respectively; the difference between those amounts and 35s. 6d. being retained by the contractors."

"Did the hon. member believe that? Was it in accordance with the evidence? Had it not been proven that the difference between the prices had been paid away on lighterage and wharfage?"

"Mr. Griffith: No.

"The Colonial Secretary: Yes.

"The Minister for Works, I say it is borne out in evidence. Mr. Hart, the agent, distinctly says so.

"Mr. Griffith: The price for the 'Tiverton' includes everything.

"The Minister for Works: It does not.

"Mr. Griffith: Make the calculation and see.

"The Minister for Works said that he asked Mr. Hart, question 2359—

"Are you the agent for the 'Tiverton'? Yes.

"What cargo did she bring here? 1,600 tons of steel rails.

"Can you tell us the rate at which the rails were carried? The vessel was chartered at a lump sum, £2,575; and that, worked out, I think you will find gives a little more than 32s. a-ton.

"Had the shippers to pay any other charges besides that 32s. a-ton? The charterers had: not the owner. The charterers had to pay the expense of lightering 600 tons up from the Bay, and that comes to 5s. 6d. a-ton; and they had also to pay 1s. a ton wharfage upon the whole cargo.

"Would that be a profitable transaction to the charterers, who received 35s. 6d. a-ton? If it was an individual case, it would be a very poor transaction. It would not be a loss exactly."

He (Mr. Dickson) had gone fully into the calculation to see whether the hon. member for North Brisbane or the Minister for Works was correct, and he found that, taking the amount paid as a lump sum for the charter of the ship, lighterage on 600 tons at 5s. 6d. per ton., and wharfage at 1s. per ton, would bring up the amount to 35s. 3d., thus showing a clear profit of 3s. 3d. per ton, as stated by the hon. member for North Brisbane. He merely mentioned that as he thought the hon. gentleman, in the heat of his argument, had gone a little further than he intended. He had already stated that he did not wish to protract the discussion upon a subject with which the House and country would be pretty well satiated, but he felt himself justified in referring to what he had already stated concerning the manner in which the report, in its original form, had been weakened, and its impartiality detracted from, by the chairman of the committee allowing himself to accept amendments suggested by the Government, and which had the effect of weakening the statements in several remarkable instances. He should advert to two or three of them just to point out the effect of the divergence from the original character of the report, because although hon. members had the opportunity of ascertaining this by going through the minutes of the committee which sat to consider the chairman's report, yet the information could only be extracted with some small amount of trouble, and could not be so clearly placed before the House as by pointing out the instances to which he had referred. He would refer to clause 16 of the report first. It now read—

"McIlwraith, McEacharn, and Co. were the lowest and successful tenderers, at 35s. 6d. per ton to all ports, a larger price than the average previously paid by the Government; but your Committee do not consider that the freight is in any way excessive for full-cargo ships, there being evidence to show that rails are by no means a favourite cargo with shipowners. The Agent-General has, however, allowed part of the rails to come out in berth ships, paying the same freight as for full-cargo ships; and in the opinion of your Committee the interests of the colony have suffered through the person

responsible for the omission failing to demand a reduction in freight corresponding to the advantage given to the contractors, and that it was unfair to the other firms tendering to depart from a condition which they must have taken into consideration in deciding on the price they were prepared to carry rails at. On this point, Mr. Macalister has furnished an explanation by telegram, which has been corroborated by letter received by the Premier from Mr. Andrew McIlwraith, that the condition referred to was waived by Mr. Hamilton. The truth of this explanation is denied by Mr. Hamilton. As Mr. Hamilton ought at that time to have charged himself with the conduct of the shipping arrangements, he cannot be relieved of the responsibility of the concession."

The original report read thus:—

"McIlwraith, McEacharn, and Co. were the lowest and successful tenderers, at 35s. 6d. per ton to all ports; and your committee do not consider that the freight is in any way excessive, there being evidence to show that rails are by no means a favourite cargo with shipowners. The Agent-General has, however, allowed part of the rails to come out in berth ships, paying the same freight as for full-cargo ships; and in the opinion of your committee he has neglected the interests of the colony in not demanding a reduction in freight corresponding to the advantage given to the contractors, and that it was unfair to the other firms tendering to depart from a condition which they must have taken into consideration in deciding on the price they were prepared to carry rails at."

That was a statement which could not be demurred to. There was evidence of a contradictory character regarding Mr. Hamilton's participation in this concession. He himself repeatedly denied ever having made a concession. On the other hand, Mr. Andrew McIlwraith, in a letter to the Premier, contended that the concession was made by Mr. Hamilton, and the Agent-General also in a telegram stated so. Still, the matter came under the head of contradicted evidence, and there was nothing to justify the committee in concluding that the concession was made as the amended report would indicate. The amendment which the members of the Government and the Government supporters introduced was the following:—

"On this point Mr. Macalister has furnished an explanation by telegram, which has been corroborated by letter received by the Premier from Mr. Andrew McIlwraith, that the condition referred to was waived by Mr. Hamilton. The truth of this explanation is denied by Mr. Hamilton, but as your committee believe he was at that time charged with the conduct of the shipping arrangements of the office he cannot be relieved of the responsibility of the concession."

This is one of the instances where the original report of the chairman was considerably weakened, and to his mind it assumed an appearance of partisanship which, to do the hon. gentleman, the chairman, justice, he strictly studied to avoid in his original draft. Then, again, there was another notable instance in the 19th clause. Under the head of "charges" the original report read thus:—

"Mr. Hamilton's evidence implies that the Premier visited the Barrow Hæmatite Co.'s works after the inquiry into the working of the London office had begun, and his attention had been called to the two invoices for the same rails, either for the purpose of inquiry or to prevent any inquiry disclosing facts damaging to himself or his friends. The Premier, in his evidence, contradicts all this, except the fact that he visited the Moss Bay and Barrow Hæmatite Co.'s works. He gives as the cause of his visit a wish to see some of the works where rails were manufactured, and fixes the date of his visit as the 17th March—fourteen days before he had seen Mr. Hamilton's letter of the 31st March. He denies ever having mentioned the matter Mr. Hamilton went to inquire about; that at the time of his visit he was ignorant of it, and that at no other time has he visited Barrow-in-Furness. Your Committee are of opinion that this, as a matter that affects the honour of the colony and the Premier, ought to be completely cleared up, and they recommend your Honourable House to take such steps for that purpose as may to it seem best."

That was the original draft of the report. The members of the Government and the hon. mem-

ber who supported them in the committee wished to omit the latter part of the clause commencing with "your committee are of opinion," and they were omitted from that portion of the report through the instrumentality of the hon. members referred to, and the following clause was submitted for insertion :—

"It appears that, with the view to determine this question, Mr. Macalister was, on the 20th October, instructed by telegram to ascertain from the managing director the date of the Premier's visit to the Barrow works; to which inquiry Mr. Smith replies that, 'Premier visited these works once only, on March 24th, with Ashwell, engineer.' Mr. Hamilton's charge on this point, therefore, completely falls to the ground."

With reference to the date—namely, the 20th of October—he would remark that it was after the committee had actually closed its deliberations, and, indeed, was the date upon which the chairman laid the report of the committee upon the table. The chairman did not go so far as to accept the last line, stating that Mr. Hamilton's charge completely fell to the ground; but he admitted a very extraordinary paragraph of information derived from a telegram which was obtained after the committee had ceased its deliberations, and after he himself had placed the draft report upon the table. He (Mr. Dickson) could not see what object there was to have been gained by merely ascertaining by telegram the date of the visit of the Premier to the Barrow Works. No one questioned that the hon. gentleman had been there, and as the answer given was merely that the Premier visited the works on March 24th with Mr. Ashwell, the engineer, it led to no conclusion whatever as to what the Premier's object was, other than what he himself stated, and which the committee had no disinclination to accept—namely, that he visited the works in accordance with a suggestion of the Agent-General to inspect the works of some of the rail manufacturers accompanied by Mr. Ashwell. This was the second instance where the impartiality of the report had been decidedly weakened. Then he came to the clause treating with the contractors, and perhaps this was the most remarkable divergence of opinion on behalf of the chairman to be found in the entire report. Clause 24, as originally framed by the chairman, ran thus :—

"There is evidence before your Committee which proves that the Premier and the Colonial Secretary (the Honourable A. H. Palmer) are, as trustees, the registered owners of shares in some vessels of the Scottish Line which have been employed by contractors to the Queensland Government. No evidence has been taken, except that of the Premier, as to whether or not this ownership makes him a contractor, and he denies that he is or has been such. This question is now before the Supreme Court, and, pending its action, your Committee respectfully refrain from giving any opinion."

That expression of opinion might have been objected to by some as too reluctantly facing the difficulty, but the chairman in his draft showed a commendable prudence. It was a difficult question to decide upon at the present time, and it might not have been altogether prudent for the committee to give a decided opinion until the question before the Supreme Court was fully settled. But what did the hon. gentleman do? He accepted an amendment moved by members of the Government to this effect :—

"It is in evidence that the Premier and the Colonial Secretary are, as trustees, registered shareholders in the 'Scottish Hero' and other vessels which have been employed in the conveyance of emigrants under a contract entered into between Messrs. McLlwraith, McEacharn, and Co., and the Government of Queensland, in December, 1878; but as the evidence also shows that, though shareholders in those vessels, they have no interest, direct or indirect, in such contract, and do not participate either in the profits or losses, your Committee are of opinion that the allegation that the Premier and the Colonial Secretary are Government contractors has not been sustained."

Here there was a direct expression of opinion upon a matter which the hon. gentleman, the chairman, had at first determined was beyond the province of the committee to express any opinion upon; and by his own vote—for it was not forced on him by the committee—the chairman eliminated his own clause, which to his (Mr. Dickson's) mind had, at anyrate, the merit of leaving the question open to be decided by a higher tribunal, and inserted an expression of opinion affirming, by his own casting vote, a matter the propriety of which he must have had considerable doubts about. He (Mr. Dickson) regretted that this should have been so, because the report would have met with more general approval had it been shown from the first that the chairman was determined to abide by it irrespective of influence or opinion from either side. What the opinions of the members of the Government or the committee were could be fully determined by glancing at other amendments which he would read, but of which the authors themselves must have felt ashamed, because they did not press their insertion at the conclusion of the report. It was, however, just as well that these opinions should not be lost in the records of *Hansard*, but that the feelings of the members of the Government at the time the report was under consideration should be recorded, in order that the public might contrast their action now in agreeing to a further inquiry with what their intentions must have been at that time, had they seen any probability of the chairman accepting their amendments. The amendments that were to have been inserted were headed "General Remarks," and were as follows :—

"In conclusion, your committee feel it incumbent upon them to point out—

"1. That, as shown by the evidence, the petitioner is the London representative of a firm who were permitted by the late Secretary to supply, without competition, goods required by the Agent-General's office for the public service.

"2. That most of the allegations in the petition are, as admitted by Mr. Hamilton, based upon information supplied by him after his dismissal from the Government service.

"3. That in consequence of the unsatisfactory state of the London department, the Premier was, on the eve of his departure for England last year, authorised by Executive minute to inquire into its condition, and was also invested with plenary powers of dismissal and appointment.

"4. That although, prior to the receipt of Mr. Hamilton's letter of the 31st March, no formal inquiry had been held by the Premier, the Agent-General had, under his instructions, taken such steps with respect to the Secretary as may be deemed to have prompted that officer to make the imputations conveyed in such letter.

"5. That while, under any circumstances, the incriminatory statements of a dismissed officer should be received with caution, the allegations of a witness whose evidence in London is inconsistent with that given by him in the colony should, unless it is supported by more trustworthy information, be absolutely discredited."

Then came clause 6 of these "General Remarks," and, as it was the gem of the lot, he would ask hon. members to listen to it carefully :—

"That the statements of the Premier of the colony in respect of his execution of the responsible duties imposed upon him by the Executive Council are, in the absence of credible testimony to the contrary, entitled to be received as conclusive evidence upon the matters to which they refer."

He wished particularly to emphasise the words "as conclusive evidence," because if the latter part of the paragraph was one that could be endorsed, there was no necessity for further inquiry at all—the statements of the Premier would suffice. But it was incumbent upon the Government, now it was determined that an investigation should proceed, if they were sincere in wishing for a searching inquiry, to see that it was a *bonâ fide* one—one which would give

full confidence to the country, and be the fullest and freest inquiry possible. He trusted it would not turn out to be a mere *fiasco* of an inquiry that would hereafter be scouted and derided and looked upon as an attempt to whitewash all parties implicated in the transactions complained of: and it would be this if it was not satisfactorily demonstrated how the colony had lost this large amount of money. As he had already stated, it was not the character of Mr. Hamilton that was at stake; it was not whether he was a man of credence or a person not to be relied on; it was a question as to how the colony had lost £60,000 by these transactions. Nor was it a question whether it was merely a commercial transaction, as the hon. member for Blackall mildly put it. He (Mr. Dickson) could not consent to view it in that light. Had the hon. gentleman characterised it as a remarkably smart transaction nearly approaching what might be called a swindle, it would have been more in accordance with the character it had assumed. However this might be, it was incumbent upon this Chamber, if the further inquiry was decided upon, to see that it would be one which would in its component parts be so satisfactory that it could silence all objections on either side of the House hereafter, and he hoped that the report of the commission, which ought to be insisted upon, would have some finality, and enable them to consider this matter as being fairly and fully dealt with. That would not be done if the Government did not give some attention to the suggestion of the hon. member for Maryborough. It was only due to the House that some member of the Government should express an opinion of the views of the Government on this matter, after the very cogent remarks of his hon. friend the member for Maryborough. This commission should be such as to satisfy the expectations of the country, and that could only be fully done by selecting from either side of the House men of acknowledged ability who had investigated the subject thoroughly, and were prepared, in conjunction with some gentleman to be appointed by the Colonial Office, as suggested by the Government, to enter into a thorough investigation of the matter. Before the debate closed, it was due to the House that the Government should either say that they would consider the suggestion or give good reasons for declining to accept it. It was no use any longer debating the merits of the question itself. They had arrived at the position that no amount of argument on either side could alter the views of the question individually entertained by the representatives of the people, or would alter the very strong opinions which were most extensively held upon it by the people of the colony. The question had eclipsed all other political considerations during the session, and until it was satisfactorily disposed of it would always be an irritating element in considering purely political matters which might emanate from the present Government, and which might have to be considered by the present Opposition. He trusted, therefore, that the Government would not be above accepting a suggestion, even though it came from the Opposition side of the House, and would appoint a commission so constituted that it would command the entire confidence of the country and furnish a complete refutation of any accusation which might be directed against it that it had been so formed as to be satisfactory to those persons only who were considered to be inculturated. He trusted that before the debate closed the Government would give some expression of opinion on that point, and if they agreed with the suggestion no one would be more ready to congratulate the Government on having chosen the proper course than the members of the Opposi-

sition. If the Government were not disposed to accede to the suggestion, they ought, at any rate, to let the House know whom they contemplated sending on that very important duty. He trusted they would relieve any one person from such an invidious position, by appointing two or more gentlemen of recognised ability who would be able to dispose of all matters in a manner so as to close this unsatisfactory subject for ever.

After a pause,

Mr. REA said he was astonished that during the most important debates that had taken place during the session the Ministry studiously remained silent. But, after all, it was perhaps wise for them to limit the debate on their side of the House to the speech of the Minister for Works, who, in accordance with the cue given him by his colleagues, had mainly limited himself to abusing Mr. Hamilton, and touching nothing else except by way of misrepresentation. If such a question had occurred in any of the other colonies, or in England, where the head of a Ministry was specially implicated in a number of most questionable transactions the Ministerial supporters would have taken a very different course. It seemed to be a new view of Parliamentary Government that hon. members were not to call in question the conduct of a Premier or a Minister. What was the Opposition sent into Parliament for but to watch a Ministry, and to suspect them—to call in question their every act and statement. The Premier himself last session gave the Opposition the right cue to their duties on this occasion, when he volunteered the statement that, as he had become Premier, he had forfeited all the land he held in South Australia, because the holding of it would have given an impression that he would follow his own interests in legislation bearing in that direction. That was their justification for following him step by step through England, and watching his conduct with regard to everything that had been brought forth in the voluminous evidence. When the Premier arrived at Cork he and his brother on board the steamer assumed the aspect of the innocents abroad. They were the merest children in commercial transactions. They might have nudged each other quietly, but there was not a word said about the £60,000 or about the buying up of the rails. The hon. member (Mr. Douglas) had stated his theory of the transaction, and he (Mr. Rea) would give his, and it was that the transaction began in Brisbane when the telegrams were sent to England—when the Brisbane partner of McIlwraith, McEacharn, and Company telegraphed to his partner in London, "Buy up all the rails you can." That gentleman was cognisant of all that was going on in the Government, and the result was that his partners bought up all the rails that were suitable for Queensland. When the Premier got to London no question was asked by him as to what that big contract was. While in London the Premier assumed the character of the Man in the Iron Mask. When asked whether he had made inquiries as to the steel-rail manufacture, he declared that it was not his business to make inquiries. He stood upon his dignity as Premier of the colony, and did not even ask about the contract with his brother. When the freight contract came to be arranged the Premier once more assumed the character of the Man in the Iron Mask; nobody could see what he was driving at, and he studiously held aloof from making any inquiries about it. Had the Premier gone to England on his own private business and the £60,000 was to come out of his own private pocket, would he not have made some inquiries into the ramifications of that big

contract of his brother's? What would be thought in England if an accusation of that sort were to be brought against Mr. Gladstone and he had made no inquiries into it? He would have said at once to his brother, "You must have nothing to do with Queensland business so long as I am Premier; you must sell those ships, or put them into another trade." In Victoria they had scrutinised the conduct of the Premier in this matter very closely—thanks to the statesmanlike determination of the hon. member for Maryborough that the public should be kept informed of what was going on in the committee. He happened to be in Melbourne at the time of the capture of the Kelly gang, and afterwards, and said to a friend there lately that it was a disgrace to the colony that a gang of outlaws should have kept the whole community in a state of excitement for so many months. His friend turned upon him and said, "Does any man from Queensland talk about the Kelly gang? Our Kelly gang have only robbed the banks of a few hundred pounds; while your Kelly gang—the Ministry—have robbed enough to start three or four banks into existence." The public in all the colonies had arrived at the conclusion that there was fraud in those transactions, no matter how they might be slurred over or misreported. The protest accompanying the report was very properly limited to the evidence that was not contradicted, and only arrived at conclusions which would be fully proved. Hon. members on the other side might deem it their duty in this matter to give Ministers a loyal support, but there was no such obligation on members of the Opposition; and he trusted every hon. member on that side would express his individual opinion on the voluminous evidence before them. The Premier's answers to the questions put to him reminded him of the Italian witness in the trial of Queen Caroline, whose answer to any puzzling question was always "*Non mi ricordo.*" To prove that he would read a few of the hon. gentleman's answers, and then hon. members would see how far they were from being straightforward answers, such as a man like Gladstone would have given. He particularly referred to questions 1957, 1958, 2012, 2047, 2131, 2132, 2135, and 2140:—

"Do you remember whether any other companies that were not invited to tender were mentioned? No; I do not remember any particularly.

"And do you remember the Haslam Co. being mentioned as amongst the persons from whom tenders should be invited? It is probable that it was mentioned. I do not remember specifically.

"And did you never hear from anyone else anything about rails, while in England;—anything more about the rails in which your brother's firm had done a good thing? No. I might have heard, but I do not remember specifically.

"Did you mention to your brother, Mr. Andrew McIlwraith, at any time, the fact that you were going to call for tenders for rails. Oh! it is very likely; I do not remember having said anything to him before I gave the instructions to call for tenders. I never told him before he saw it in the papers.

"Try to recollect!—did not you give instructions to forward the freight of the 15,000 tons of rails? Very likely I did; and I am responsible, with the Agent-General, for calling for freights for the carriage of 15,000 tons of rails as a whole.

"Did not you direct that to be done? Very likely. I do not remember it, but I am quite ready to take the responsibility of it; because I approve of it.

"And did you direct that to be done? It is quite likely. I do not remember that I did. I assume the responsibility.

"Can you understand its being done? I was not managing the Agent-General's Office when I was at home."

Those were questions which no man could have any doubt about. In January last, when the Premier first reached London, he was informed that rumours had been circulated by Mr. Hamil-

ton that Mr. Ashwell was holding shares in companies who held contracts under the Queensland Government. In a similar case, Mr. Gladstone would have asked whether it was true, but the Premier did not say a syllable about it. Had he been straightforward he would have dismissed Mr. Ashwell at once, instead of attempting to throw obloquy on another officer. He trusted the House would not adopt the report of the Select Committee, and if he stood alone he intended to move an amendment upon it. The committee had not done their duty with regard to the evidence, and it ought to be sent back to them until the report was more satisfactory to the House and to the country. One thing he felt bound to say, and that was that the manner in which the leader of the Opposition had acted throughout in the matter, and the persistent determination he had shown to get at the truth, had made all Queensland proud of him. The question of freight had been made subordinate to that of steel rails purchase, but, if possible, it was less creditable to the Ministry than the other. There was no getting out of it that the contract for freight was so planned that the firm of McIlwraith, McEacharn and Co. should get it at all hazards. He would again ask the House— for it was necessary to have a high standard— what Gladstone would have done under similar circumstances? Would he have sheltered himself from responsibility and complicity behind the petticoats of a female relative, saying "the money did not come into my pocket?" It was discreditable to the Premier to attempt to screen himself in such a way. He trusted hon. members would not shrink from anything in the evidence, no matter whom it touched, and it was evidently pre-arranged that the freight contract should go to McIlwraith, McEacharn and Co. When they saw a family of commercial upstarts grasping their arms round the money-bags of Queensland, and saying, "We have three more years yet to fill our pockets," it was time to look round. It was most humiliating for a colony like Queensland to be in the hands of such characters, and they ought at once to decide that it should never occur again, even if they had to pay them off; but by all means let them never employ that company's ships again. Public men ought to aim at a higher standard of political morality. It was by that means alone that England now stood above all other nations. Instead of following that bright example, Queensland was getting very near to the position held by the South American Republics—the men who held custody of the public purse could not be trusted because it was feared they would put the money into their own pockets. It would be for the House to find out some way by which this rail contract and the contract for freights could be stopped. It should further be considered that this action must be taken in conjunction with other actions of the Ministry. The rail contract had apparently been determined upon by the worthies in England, and hon. members could see the beginning of another compact about to be entered into with this celebrated Baron Erlanger. Taking all those facts into consideration, could hon. members shut their eyes to the fact that this colony was doomed to be plundered right and left by a gang of speculators? The Premier had tried to make out that he was an innocent and inexperienced kind of person, and it was the duty of himself and of his colleagues to try to clear him; and the next step would be to ascertain the names of those persons who were to represent the colony in London. If the House consented to the adoption of the report, it would be a secondary and subsidiary consideration as to whom the Government would send home. They were to have the selection of a person to

scrutinise their conduct. What could they do better than appoint Mr. Ashwell? The thing assumed a ludicrous aspect when the appeal made by the members of the Ministry was borne in mind. In the anti-slavery-agitation times prints used to be exhibited in London, showing a negro in fetters, with this appeal, "Am I not a man and a brother?" In this examination the appeal all through was, "Am I not a man and a brother-in-law?" Brothers-in-law seemed to be everywhere wherever one went. This was a most discreditable and most disgraceful combination of relations. In Canada, at one time, there was almost a revolution caused by what was called the "family compact." That consisted of the old families; but this combination was of the very opposite caste. It was painful to think that the colony of Queensland was to be taken charge of by these men, to be for the next three years at their mercy. If this plunder could not be stopped the colony could stop nothing. The hon. member for Blackall, in moving the adoption of the report, said the transaction in London resolved itself into a successful mercantile transaction. If that were so, he (Mr. Rea) failed to see where successful mercantile transactions ended and where fraud began. Were they to wait until they saw one man pick another man's pocket before they called any transaction a fraud. The actions of men must be judged by their tendency. As the Premier stated last year, where a man had large private interests he would naturally lean in that direction when his public functions crossed his interests. He held that in all these cases, and especially in the case of the freight contract, it was the duty of gentlemen holding positions of members of the Government to keep relations at their arms' length. For the reasons he had stated he should move an amendment on the motion. At the same time, he wished to state that he did so on his own responsibility, because he felt that the leader of the Opposition should be in no way compromised by the action of any member of the Opposition. This was a case in which he held it was necessary for each member to maintain his individuality. He therefore moved as an amendment the following:—

That this House, having taken into consideration the evidence contained and set forth as given before the committee appointed by this House on the 15th July, 1890, known as 'The Committee on the purchase and freight of steel rails,' is of opinion that said report of committee now on the table of this House dated 30th October, 1890, and signed 'A. Archer,' in no way meets the case which the honour of this House requires, in order to acquit members of this House before the bar of public opinion, in these colonies and in England, of the charge of servile hesitation in declining to pronounce outright that in these transactions referred to fraud against the Treasury of Queensland has been committed to a huge amount. And that the only thing still in abeyance for examination is, as to how many persons were concerned in said frauds, and into whose pockets, and into how many pockets, the money arising from said frauds has gone."

MR. RUTLEDGE said he did not intend to say more than a few words on a question that had been occupying the attention of the House during the last two nights. Before proceeding to state his views, he wished to say that he could not altogether approve of the terms of the amendment just moved. In a matter of this kind it was far better that any decision that might be arrived at should be as far as possible a unanimous decision, and one that would prevent the introduction of any more animosity than was absolutely necessary. He was satisfied that a discussion of the amendment as it now stood was likely to revive a very great deal of the bitter feeling which it was hoped would be suspended, or altogether obliterated, for the time being. A great deal had been said, by the Minister

for Works particularly, with reference to the altered tone of the discussion on the now celebrated steel-rail question. The hon. gentleman congratulated the leader of the Opposition last night upon what he called the altered tone of his speech. He (Mr. Rutledge) must confess that he could not see any substantial alteration in the matter of the hon. gentleman's address, whatever alteration there might have been in the manner of the delivery of it, which he had no doubt was occasioned by the quiescence of the Government and their supporters who gave the hon. gentleman what they had not previously afforded him—namely, a quiet, respectful, and attentive hearing. Had the hon. gentleman (Mr. Griffith) been allowed to address the House on questions of this magnitude in the early part of the session without interruption and without having very improper motives attributed to him, no doubt he would have shown as much calmness and as much of that which was so cordially approved of by hon. members as the Government or their supporters could desire. But if the tone of the address of the leader of the Opposition had undergone alteration, most certainly the tone of the speech of the Minister for Works had undergone very considerable alteration. At the commencement of the session hon. members were told by the Government, and by the Minister for Works especially, and by other members who championed the cause of the Government, that the Hemmant petition was a pack of malignant charges founded upon hearsay. One hon. member in the early part of the session took the petition paragraph by paragraph—"Here the petitioner says he believes; here that he is informed," and so on—and from that undertook to show that the petition consisted of a tissue of slanders which were unworthy of the serious attention of this House; and with the sentiment that hon. member gave expression to the Minister for Works and other members of the Government seemed to concur. Last night, however, the Minister for Works informed the House to his (Mr. Rutledge's) astonishment that the Government had never from the first disputed any of the allegations in this petition—that the Government had, in fact, admitted them all, and that there was no necessity to call for a commission or for the appointment of a select committee in order to discover those things which everybody admitted and nobody denied. A most remarkable change must have come over the Government before the Minister for Works—their very able advocate and mouth-piece—could have committed himself to such an acknowledgment as that. He did not, however, rise for the purpose of following in the footsteps of those who had devoted themselves to the very laborious task of analysing the evidence produced. The adoption of such a course might to some extent have the effect of spoiling what the leader of the Opposition had done, and he held that it was not desirable to unnecessarily—in common parlance—"pile up the agony." The Government having given the House an assurance that they were anxious that this matter should be thoroughly investigated in England by a competent and impartial tribunal, and having expressed a desire to assist in the creation of such a tribunal, very little more remained to be done than to discuss the question of the materials of which that tribunal should consist. Before referring to that he might state that he did not altogether approve of the manner of the speech delivered by the Minister for Works last night. Of course it must be very gratifying to the members of the Government to have an advocate and champion of the capacity of the Minister for Works—one who shone, especially, in the advocacy of the cause of those with whom he was associated; but there was a great deal in the

hon. gentleman's speech of what he (Mr. Rutledge) could not help regarding as sheer sophistry. The hon. gentleman devoted a good half of a very long oration to the endeavour to blacken the reputation of Mr. Hamilton, of whom it was said that upon his evidence rested the proof, or what was supposed to be the proof, of the allegations contained in the petition. He could do very little more than repeat what was said at the commencement of the session when this inquiry arose—namely, that the character of Mr. Hamilton was altogether beside the question. He might be as black and as bad as any informer ever was, but if the statements made by him were statements of fact, his character could not affect the character of the facts as they were disclosed. There was an old adage—very appropriate to the present occasion, more especially in view of the attempts to prove that Mr. Hamilton was a rogue, a thief, and a liar—that “when rogues fall out honest people come by their own.” Supposing it to be admitted that Mr. Hamilton was a rogue, and, for the sake of argument, that he was a liar, was it not plain to every hon. member that there had been some transaction by which the Government had lost to the extent of from £60,000 to £70,000? If Mr. Hamilton had been a party to the indiscretions and manipulations by which this kind of thing had been accomplished, would the fact of Mr. Hamilton's bad character make the result of his disclosure any less acceptable to the House, and make the pursuance of the inquiry any less imperative than they would have been had Mr. Hamilton been the most credible witness in the world? It took a rogue to catch a rogue. In connection with the greatest trials that had taken place, the Crown had been frequently driven to the employment of Queen's evidence in order to convict men who had been guilty of great crimes and misdemeanours. The evidence taken to support a charge against a notorious wrong-doer was often that of men who had been considerably tainted with the nefarious transactions which they assisted to disclose. He did not intend to draw any analogy between the present state of things and that which he had referred to by way of illustration, but the principle which held good in the one case held equally good in the other. He had only referred to the subject in order to show that when the Minister for Works was driven to blacken the character of Mr. Hamilton, he altogether passed over the main question as to the fact that something had gone wrong with regard to these rails. After all the inquiry that had been made, he could only say again as he said at the commencement of the session, that he would not believe that the Premier had participated in plunder, or gone out of his way to defile his fingers with the unholy gains which somebody had made. But when an attempt was made to show that merely a clever mercantile transaction had taken place—that, in reality, the colony had not been plundered at all, and that there had been no underhand transactions which it was the imperative duty of the House to investigate and bring to light, then it became the duty of hon. members to inquire upon what premises those conclusions rested. The Minister for Works had been driven last night for one of his proofs to assert that Mr. Hamilton was a “liar” and a man whose word could not be trusted in connection with an investigation like this, and the hon. gentleman gave several illustrations of the position he had taken up. One was this: In order to show how impossible it was that Mr. Hamilton could be believed in the suggestion he made with regard to the Premier's visit to the Barrow Company on the 24th March, in connection with the sending in of invoices on the 11th, 12th, and 13th March, the

hon. gentleman flourished a letter of Mr. Hamilton's bearing date 31st March, he showed that the Premier had made his visit on the 24th March, and then asked whether, taking those two things into consideration, the fact that the visit was made to Barrow on the 24th, while the letter drawing Mr. Macalister's attention to the invoices was not written till the 31st, the suggestions made by Mr. Hamilton did not completely fall to the ground. If that was to be regarded as one of the proofs that those charges had fallen to the ground, then the reasoning upon which those proofs were supported was very weak reasoning indeed. There was no doubt that the invoices were sent into the London office. Mr. Hamilton would not keep them locked up, but would treat them in the ordinary way in the execution of his duty. Were they not open to the inspection of Mr. Ashwell or anyone else in that office, and did not Mr. Hamilton take considerable time to revolve the question in his mind? Was it not likely that he thought “what shall I do with this information which has now come before me for the first time,” and that he took some time to determine what course he should adopt before he wrote that letter marked “private and confidential” to Mr. Macalister. Did the fact that Mr. Hamilton wrote that letter on the 31st, and that the Premier made his visit on the 24th, do away with the conviction that there was something more in the visit than a mere visit of curiosity to see what sort of rails were being made there? He referred to these things, not because he wished to blacken anyone's character, or throw out any aspersions, but to support a conviction which he in common with other hon. members had arrived at, that further investigation of a searching character was absolutely necessary. In Mr. McEacharn's evidence the following answer was given in reply to Mr. Griffith—

“837. What did you do then? On 26th September Mr. Thomassen informed me that his tender had been accepted; and I telegraphed to London same date:—

“‘Ibbotson's tender is accepted. To be delivered here. We have secured freight room for 17,000 tons.’ The code word was ‘pounds’; but it was understood that it would mean ‘tons’ as well as pounds:—

“‘1,700 tons, Brisbane, 30s.; 26,000 northern ports, 47s.’”

Here was a telegram sent by Mr. McEacharn to his partner in London. The meaning of it, which was as plain as words could make it, was this: “Ibbotson's tender for rails to be supplied to the Queensland Government has been accepted by the Government.” Then, hinging upon that was this other meaning: “Since Ibbotson Brothers are the successful tenderers, Ibbotson's are going to give us a part of the advantage they have acquired by giving us the carriage in our ships of 17,000 tons of rails to Brisbane at 30s., and of 26,000 tons to northern ports at 47s.” In the face of that could any man in his senses believe the statement made by Mr. McEacharn when he said that a mutilated telegram had been placed in the hands of his partner in London, and that under the misapprehension thereby conveyed his partner became himself the purchaser of 30,000 tons of rails! How, except by a distortion of language from its plain ordinary meaning could the partner of Mr. McEacharn have been induced by that telegram to become the purchaser of rails? If there was no other fact than that, he maintained there would be the most imperative necessity for a searching investigation into the whole matter. Something had been kept back, though he did not say it had been kept back by the Premier. He believed the Premier was a man of considerable ambition, who desired to perpetuate his position in the colony, and who now occupied a very proud position which he would not barter

for the sake of a share of the profit on 40,000 tons of rails; but he believed that those who had been about him, and who had taken advantage of the fact of their connection with him, had been parties to the introduction of a system of things by which the colony had lost to the enormous extent of from £80,000 to £70,000. This was a fact which required to be searchingly investigated for the sake of the reputation of the colony and the Premier—which should come out all the brighter for the investigation—before a competent and impartial tribunal. With regard to the constitution of this tribunal, the Government said that they proposed to send home a gentleman from this colony—presumably one who would be familiar with the whole of these transactions, as, indeed, nearly every intelligent colonist had no doubt by this time made himself acquainted with all the particulars. This gentleman the Government proposed to nominate. In this case the Government were virtually on their trial, because, although they might be acquitted of participating in any felonious transaction, they were responsible for losses which were just as grievous to the colony as they would have been had they been feloniously brought about. The privilege was to be extended to the Government of nominating one to go home to see fair-play done to the Government. He did not wish to insinuate that the Government desired to send home a partisan or someone who would act as their advocate, and take care to shape all inquiry in such a way that what was elicited should be in favour of the Government alone; but hon. members must know very well that the Government were not likely to appoint an enemy. Hon. members knew that they were more likely to appoint a friend, and that his inclination would be, and his hope would be, to bring the matter out in such a way that the Government should not in any manner be reflected upon in the result of the inquiries by that commission. The wish was father to the thought, and as a rule that which any man hoped for he tried to effectuate. It was only in the nature of things that, if a man had a strong friendly leaning towards an individual privately, that leaning had a tendency to extend towards public matters. They knew that friendships in public life were frequently not the result of the approbation of a man's public policy and acts, but the result of private leanings, friendships, and associations. There were numbers of men who went contrary to their ordinary political convictions in order to gratify private preferences. The same thing would hold good with regard to a commission of the character to which he had referred. No one would deny the Government the right to appoint some one on the commission who would see that they got fairplay; but the Government said that in order that the interests of the colony might be studied a commissioner would be nominated by the Home Office, or that Earl Kimberley would be memorialised to make such an appointment. He would ask whether the most intelligent man they could produce in London, having no knowledge of all the little transactions with which they were familiar, would be competent to go into an inquiry of the sort? He knew that if the hon. member for North Brisbane had not been on the committee they would not have got one-half of what they had before them. He did not wish to reflect on his colleague (Mr. Dickson), or on the hon. member for the Logan—competent and intelligent as they were in most respects—but he must say that they were not the men who could have elicited what had been elicited by the skilled inquiries of the leader of the Opposition. Any London gentleman would labour under a great disadvantage in being ignorant of the matters

which it was desired should be investigated, and there was no man in London who had much respect for his time who would endeavour to master all the ramifications of the question, or to make himself familiar with the evidence already taken. It would be an intellectual feat for any man who was entirely ignorant of the matter to wade through the mass of documents and qualify himself to utilise their contents in investigating the matter as it ought to be investigated. That being so, this necessity seemed to follow: that there should be two commissioners, one appointed by the Government and one by the Opposition. He did not see any harm in that, and the Minister for Works said he did not see any objection to it. Judging from the speech of the Minister for Works he thought the hon. member was speaking on behalf of the Government, and that they really had no objection to that proposal.

Mr. MOREHEAD: Let us all go home.

Mr. RUTLEDGE said probably they would all like a holiday trip, but he was afraid in that case that the old adage that too many cooks spoil the broth would be applicable. They would have the members of the House of Commons flocking to witness the method in which they did their business; and he was afraid that the spectacle of how they transacted business, if it was like what sometimes happened here, would be much more amusing than edifying to the grave and reverend signors who sat in the House of Commons. To him it seemed imperative that they should have more than one commissioner who would be conversant with the case. A witness, who was being cross-examined by the hon. member for North Brisbane during the inquiry, objected to being teased by fishing inquiries; and if they appointed a gentleman unacquainted with the case they would have a fishing inquiry. What they all wanted to avoid was a fishing inquiry, and that could only be avoided by having commissioners who knew thoroughly well what required elucidation. In ordinary business matters, if there was a dispute between two men they appointed arbitrators, who in their turn appointed an umpire, who would be a neutral party in case of their disagreeing. Why should not the same principle be applied to politics? He did not see what the Government had to fear. As he had said before, he did not, and would not until he was compelled, believe that the Premier had soiled his fingers in the matter.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: We don't care what you believe.

Mr. RUTLEDGE said that might be so, but the hon. gentleman showed that he cared for some kind of public belief when he wished to have a commission appointed; there must be some motive power behind to induce him to agree to that. What was to be feared? The more searching the investigation the brighter the colours in which the Premier would appear; he would have a more triumphant refutation, and more firmly would he be seated in the position of power and on the pedestal of honour which he now occupied. Had the Government done at the outset what they were doing now, in consenting to the appointment of a commission to sit in London, all the bitterness and animosity of the session would have been avoided.

Mr. LUMLEY HILL: We don't believe that.

Mr. RUTLEDGE said he was sincere in what he said, but the hon. members of the subsection seemed to think there was no such thing as sincerity. He was afraid that that commodity must be very scarce amongst them if they were so

addicted to measuring other people's corn by their own bushel.

Mr. MOREHEAD: Chaff is more in our way.

Mr. RUTLEDGE said that was so, and just like chaff would those hon. members be blown out of the House some day by the wind of popular indignation. The session had been unduly lengthened, and he was satisfied that they were all anxious that it should come to a speedy close; but he should like them all to part on good terms, not thinking bitter things of each other. He hoped that the result of the inquiry in London would redound to the honour of the Premier and to the credit of the colony. If the Government conceded the very reasonable request made of them the result of the inquiry would be unimpeachable, and it would be entirely satisfactory to the minds of all in the colony.

Mr. MILES said that, judging from their actions, hon. members opposite seemed to think this a very good joke. The question was a grave one to him, and he must confess he never felt more humiliated than he did when he noticed hon. members jeering and laughing on such a serious question as they were doing. He looked upon the investigation as only half finished, and therefore it was a very difficult thing to give any decided opinion on the matter—in fact, it would not be fair to do that until the whole question had been thoroughly investigated. If the Government desired to have the matter investigated they ought to come forward boldly and say that they would appoint a commission which would give satisfaction, not only to the House, but to the community at large. He did not care who was appointed—it would be beyond the power of a single individual to investigate the matter in a way which would give satisfaction to the outside public. The Government seemed to be thoroughly convinced that they were free of blame, and why were they afraid to appoint a commission which would give confidence to the public? During the history of the colony they had had what was known as the black committee, another known as the kanaka committee, and he would call this the whitewashing committee. There could be no mistake about that. He was surprised at the hon. member for Blackall not suggesting the way in which the inquiry should be conducted in London so as to give satisfaction to the public. If one thing more than another convinced him of the necessity of having an impartial commission, it was the action of the Premier in regard to the Supreme Court case. The Premier had applied for a commission to take evidence at home, and the Supreme Court had granted it; but that would not deprive him (Mr. Miles) of having the matter thoroughly sifted, as he would take care that the witnesses were properly cross-examined. The action of the Government in proposing a one-sided commission would be equivalent to the Supreme Court telling him (Mr. Miles) that he could not cross-examine the witnesses who were to be examined at home; but the Supreme Court had said nothing of the sort. All that the Opposition now asked was that the inquiry at home should be conducted in the same way as the proceedings in connection with the Supreme Court case were to be conducted. It was painful to have to discuss a case which was only partly investigated. He held strong opinions respecting the matter, but he was reluctant to give expression to them until the whole thing was investigated and they knew exactly where the fault was. There could be no doubt that the country had been robbed, and until they knew who were the guilty parties it would be unfair of them to make any accusations. He noticed a strong desire on the part of mem-

bers supporting the Government to throw odium on Mr. Hamilton. When he read the evidence taken in London in connection with the charge he felt that Mr. Hamilton did not speak out as he ought to have done; but, since, he had come to the conclusion that at the time Mr. Hamilton was not desirous of committing the Agent-General any more than he could possibly help. No man cared about coming forward as an informer to blacken the characters of others.

Mr. MOREHEAD: What about yourself?

Mr. MILES said all he could say was that if he was as great a slanderer as the hon. member for Mitchell he would pluck his tongue out. There was no doubt that Mr. Hamilton was placed in an awkward position. From the day he was appointed secretary in the Agent-General's office he was accused of being a spy and a detective—in fact, all that could be said against a man was said against him by the other side. The Minister for Works asked why, if he knew all about the irregularities, as he said he did, Mr. Hamilton did not write to the Colonial Secretary. The fact was that if he had done so he would have been mad. The Colonial Secretary would at once have said, "Here is Hamilton again conspiring against the Agent-General." No man would have thought of making such a complaint, more particularly as connections of the Premier's were assisting to rob and plunder the country. As far as he was concerned, up to the time he left office he was satisfied that the business of the London office was fairly and honestly conducted; but everyone knew what the present Government did immediately they got into office. The Agent-General had been well described as a "weak-kneed official," and it was certain that had he not played into the hands of McIlwraith, McEacharn, and Co. he would have been out of office long ago. All the unpleasantness, the hostility, and the ill-feeling between Mr. Macalister and Mr. Hamilton commenced when the present Government went into office. Surrounded as the Agent-General was by Mr. Ashwell and all the McIlwraith connections, anyone who knew Mr. Macalister knew that he would suffer the country to be robbed before he would throw any opposition in the way. If it had been any other party but McIlwraith, McEacharn, and Co. connected with the affair, the Agent-General would have been turned out of office long ago.

An HONOURABLE MEMBER: And yet these were old friends.

Mr. MILES said he would not care whether they were friends or not. If he were in power, and a brother of his who was a Government official did any wrong, he would have him removed. The Government were very much mistaken if they supposed that the people would quietly submit to and acquiesce in the appointment of a one-horsed commission. He should be very sorry indeed to think that the Government were afraid to have the matter investigated: if they were not, why did they not say that they would appoint a commission which would give satisfaction to the public? Suppose the Government sent home one gentleman to investigate the matter, what would be the result? If the commissioners said that the charges were unfounded the public would not believe it, and the old feeling of hostility towards the Government would remain. He should like to say a word or two with regard to the hon. member for North Brisbane. The hon. member had been much blamed, slandered, and abused for the way in which he introduced the matter in the early part of the session. The actions of the hon. member met with his thorough concurrence. He was extremely gratified, and the people ought to be gratified, at having a gentleman in their midst like the hon. mem-

ber who would come forward in the hour of need and vindicate the honour of the colony. That remark might be distasteful to the hon. members opposite; but having had opportunities of hearing the public opinion, he would go further and say that two-thirds of the people of the colony believed that they owed a great debt of gratitude to the hon. member, and they did not hesitate to say so. He hoped the hon. member would be properly rewarded for the labour he had bestowed on his endeavours to thoroughly sift the matter.

Question—That the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question—put and passed.

The HON. G. THORN said before the original question was put he should like to offer a few remarks. The hon. member for Stanley had suggested that two gentlemen from outside should be appointed to act as commissioners, one to be chosen by the Opposition and the other by the Government, and he was in hopes that that suggestion would have been adopted.

Mr. O'SULLIVAN: I have not spoken.

Mr. THORN said the hon. member had spoken to him in that strain. He expected to find the whole affair settled early in the evening, and hon. members directing their attention to other business by that time. If the appointment was left to one side of the House the public would not be satisfied. The Government might appoint an angel or the Opposition might appoint an angel, but in either case the opposite party to that making the appointment would not be satisfied. He looked on the Speaker as being almost immaculate, but he could tell him that if he were appointed by the Government the appointment would be distasteful, probably, to all the members of the Opposition, and to a section of the Government side of the House. The reason of that was patent, and in stating it he hoped he would not be transgressing any parliamentary rule—the reason was that some hon. members looked on Mr. Speaker as a political weathercock. If there was anything unparliamentary in that statement he would apologise for having made it. The whole matter would be at once settled by the Government agreeing to the suggestion that they should appoint one commissioner and the Opposition another. There was one point on which he wished to contradict the Minister for Works, who said that when Mr. Hamilton was appointed the appointment was censured on all sides. That was not so. If he recollected rightly, the Premier praised the appointment, and went further and proposed an increase of Mr. Hamilton's salary. It was on the strength of the speech made by the hon. gentleman that night that the late Government placed an additional £100 to the salary of Mr. Hamilton. He could tell the House that the present Premier did not look upon Mr. Hamilton as a spy, and never referred to him as being one. He contended that the inquiry instituted by the Premier when in London did not warrant him in dismissing Mr. Hamilton, and there ought to have been a fresh inquiry and more evidence taken before that officer was dismissed. He did not intend to go into the main question now, but he hoped that for once and for all they would settle it and get on to other business; if they did so there was no reason why the session should not close this week, or, at any rate, next week. There was one point, however, to which he would refer. It had been stated that when he was in office he knew that the Premier was part owner of a ship; but he was not aware of it, and he was astonished that the Minister for Works should have made such a statement;—he had heard something but he knew nothing at all about it, and he would give the

statement a flat contradiction. He thought hon. members had had enough of this steel-rail business, and if the Government would say that they agreed to the suggestion contained in the amendment he was sure the country would be satisfied; but if they would not agree to it the country would not be satisfied and this thing would be going on for ever. It had been stated abroad that the Government were anxious to postpone this matter as long as they could, in order that witnesses in the old country might possibly be squared. He did not say so himself, but it had been stated outside. He was anxious to have this business settled, and he hoped the Government would allow no contract to be made in the old country until it was settled.

Mr. ARCHER, in reply, said he was not going to detain the House very long, but he wished to refer to a few points which had been mentioned in the course of debate. One of the things he should certainly not meddle with was Mr. Hamilton. There had been plenty of talk about him on one side and the other, and he was sorry that one of that gentleman's friends had defended him so badly. The hon. member for Northern Downs (Mr. Miles) asked how could Mr. Hamilton have reported to the Colonial Secretary what he saw going on in the London office unless he was mad, but he forgot, when things first went wrong, that the Colonial Secretary at the time was the hon. member for Maryborough, and not the present Colonial Secretary. However, he (Mr. Archer) was not going to deal with Mr. Hamilton at all. He had simply stated in the report he drew up that Mr. Hamilton in his answers at home and here had contradicted himself in some way, and that, therefore, his evidence was not of that sterling kind that it was supposed to be. But he was not going to enter into that now. The hon. member for North Brisbane (Mr. Griffith) stated in opening the debate that he was sorry the inquiry had begun here instead of in London, but in that respect he (Mr. Archer) differed from the hon. gentleman. He did not mean to say that the committee which had sat here, and the members of which had had very severe and arduous duties, had done all that was required, but he believed that if a commission at home had been appointed to institute the inquiry—from the fact of Mr. Hamilton and other witnesses being in this colony at the time, they would have had a great deal of trouble in getting the same amount of evidence and in arriving at the same stage of the inquiry as the committee had done here. He thought the hon. member for Enoggera (Mr. Dickson) took a more correct view of the matter when he said that the fact of a committee having already sat here would greatly facilitate the labours of the commission at home—that the cost of a committee sitting here would be very much less than those of a commission at home, and that a committee having sat here would relieve the commission at home of a great deal of the labour they would otherwise have had. He (Mr. Archer) was inclined to believe, therefore, that the work the committee had done was not labour thrown away. In introducing the motion—that the report of the committee be adopted—he stated that he looked upon the question as regarded the purchase of steel rails as a successful commercial speculation, and at the same time he recommended that the inquiry should be pursued further. It might at first appear rather difficult to reconcile those two statements, but he thought he should be able to show that the two matters were not at all difficult to reconcile. He could very well have stated in language—in very strong terms—that he did not consider that the Premier was in any way compromised in the transaction, but he took it that his action in sitting on the same side and

supporting the hon. gentleman was a much stronger proof of his belief in the hon. gentleman's honesty and honour than anything he could have said. He did not believe that anything that could be said would shake that belief. There had been one charge implied which required to be followed up, but until that was proved he was not going to withdraw the confidence he had in the hon. gentleman. A great deal had been said about defective telegrams, and mention was likewise made of mutilated letters. In regard to that part of the subject he would say this, that Mr. McEacharn, when being examined before the committee, stated distinctly that he had not the slightest objection to the hon. member for North Brisbane and himself (Mr. Archer) seeing certain letters, but he objected to their being published, as they contained matters with which the inquiry had nothing to do. The hon. member for North Brisbane declined to see anything not shown to the Committee, and he (Mr. Archer) as Chairman, did not present it; but if he had wished to see the letters in their un mutilated form he could have done so. He (Mr. Archer) had seen the letters, and there was nothing in them that Mr. McEacharn would not have shown the hon. gentleman; but there were some things that he did not wish published. Those letters showed that Mr. Andrew McIlwraith was in a very disturbed state of mind about those rails—whatever might have been the reason did not matter, or why he bought the rails did not matter; but he bought them, and he was anxious, being ignorant of what arrangements his partner in Queensland might be making. He would read a few of the portions shown to the committee:—

"And now I think I have touched upon all business except rails, at present the most interesting and exciting subject of them all. The various messages have been coming through in a very mutilated form, as you will see from the readings as we make out.

"Our reply to your message asking question was sent on the 5th September. Owing to the very excited state of the metal market we were unable to do better.

I had been expecting your next message for a new quotation, and was ready to give another immediate price—subject to fourteen days—for reply.

and I am afraid unless there is word from you soon our friends will endeavour to back out."

Then came some *laches* which no one could fill up. Mr. McEacharn said lower down, in answer to the hon. member for North Brisbane, that the concluding sentence in one letter from Mr. A. McIlwraith was—

"And after consulting with our financial agent we telegraphed you to reduce the price."

Thus it was evident that Mr. A. McIlwraith had made an arrangement for rails, and was anxious until he heard from his partner. Here was another extract—

"I scarcely make out from the reference you make to Thomassen whether you are working in conjunction with him or otherwise. Your messages come to us as a rule in a very mutilated form. On the 16th instant I asked you to repeat part of your message on the 11th instant, but as you made no reference to my request in your message of the 27th I conclude you thought the matter of no great importance. I again set to work, and at last hit upon what I consider is the proper reading of this message, viz.:—

"Telegram arrived. Will reply by mail. Rails—Have arranged with Thomassen. Telegraph instructions, &c., &c. Copy enclosed. This matter is still obscure * * *

* * * and as it may assume a very serious aspect to us owing to the rise in all hæmatite iron * * * I wired you again asking for particulars: see copy message dated 30th October.

"The position of matters here certainly justifies us in being anxious. The Government wire home they have made a contract with Ibbotson's agent, subject to being ratified in London for 42,000 tons of rails. You say you have arranged with Thomassen. I wrote Ibbot-

son to see if they can give any explanation. They say, No, * * * that they have placed no orders for delivery forward. Now, if such is the case, it will be impossible to place a rail under £7 per ton for delivery over twelve months; and as for five years, I don't think a single work would look at it under £10 a ton, or at least £9. If you have therefore gone in upon joint risk, leaving the purchase in Ibbotson's hands, I am afraid it is a bad job, and for that reason we are anxious to know, so that we may protect ourselves by holding on * * *

That was to say, that he had secured rails believing that Ibbotson's were bound to deliver a certain quantity to the Queensland Government. He had bought the rails and was most anxious to know what were the terms come to by his partner, and protect himself. Those letters, although mutilated in many instances, were quite sufficient to show that Mr. A. McIlwraith, writing from London, was in a great state of doubt as to what his partner here had done, as it might so happen that the transaction might result in a serious loss. Was there, after all, anything surprising in the circumstance that a person who was in the habit of conducting business was anxious to know what his partner was doing, more especially as rails were steadily going up in the market? That statement was proved by many facts—by the fact that Smellie and Company would have been able to tender for rails at £5 10s. a-ton a couple of months before, and that Mr. A. McIlwraith could not purchase them under £6 per ton at the time he did. In whatever way they might learn from a future inquiry that these rails were disposed of to the Queensland Government, the transaction of buying rails to supply a contract was a perfectly legitimate one. He was quite sure that when buying those rails Mr. McIlwraith was not certain whether he had made a good or bad bargain, not knowing what his partner was doing here. But it was a fair transaction throughout, as no man would not take advantage of a rising market, and no man would think of selling rails, bought when the market was low, at the same price when it was rising. He did not know that any man would consider himself bound to do so. He had merely stated that to show that although he was perfectly convinced the transaction itself was simply a mercantile transaction, he did not say that there were not things connected with the question which might not be inquired into at some future day. At present it seemed to him to have all the elements of a perfectly correct and justifiable mercantile transaction. There were other points in the speech of the member for North Brisbane to which he would call attention. The hon. member stated that "the House did not care whether Messrs. McIlwraith and Company made 5 or 500 per cent. on a legitimate transaction: the matters really involved were that the Government of this colony was induced unnecessarily to incur an enormous expenditure of money—that that transaction took place in an irregular manner during the presence of the Premier in England." He (Mr. Archer) would like to know in what way the country had been robbed, or how an unnecessarily large amount of money had been paid. He would put the whole transaction in this way. Supposing Mr. Thomassen had never been in Queensland before, he believed that they would have been paying exactly the same for their rails that they were now doing. Supposing Mr. Thomassen had not been here, and the Premier had been on his way to England, no one foreseeing the probability of a rise in rails, he (Mr. Archer) had not the slightest doubt that not one rail would have been bought till the Premier got home. Rails at that time had reached the lowest point they had ever reached in the history of

rail-making in England; it was therefore hardly probable that they would fall lower. He presumed that people were making them merely to keep their works going. There was not the slightest sign at that time that any rise would take place, which could be proved by manufacturers themselves being quite prepared to take orders. Mr. Smellie had an offer of 20,000 tons at £5 5s., whereas if the manufacturer who made the offer had been aware of the rise that was going to take place at home, he would have held back, and have got £7 or £8 a-ton for them. It was a fact that manufacturers at home knew so little about the probable rise in the price of rails that they were willing to take a little over £4 and £5 per ton: whereas had they held on for a little time they could have sold them for £8 or £9 a-ton. How, then, could the Minister be blamed for not foreseeing what the manufacturers at home did not see? It was very easy to say that the Minister should have telegraphed home to ascertain what probability of a rise there was, but manufacturers were at that time selling rails at such low prices as merely to keep things going. The hon. member for North Brisbane told the House last evening that if the Premier had gone in for a small quantity of rails and held over for a few months he would have got them cheaper. That was quite true so far as June and July last were concerned, but it was not so now, and people could not always wait to see what was likely to take place. The Premier, in reducing the quantity of rails to be purchased for Queensland from 42,000 tons to 15,000 tons showed that he was not anxious to invest in a large quantity in the then state of the market. There was nothing, therefore, in the evidence to show that Queensland had been made to pay a larger sum than it would have paid under other circumstances. On the contrary, if Mr. Thomassen had never been to Queensland the Premier would not have got rails one shilling cheaper; and therefore the statement of the hon. member for North Brisbane was incorrect. It was not true that Queensland had been robbed of a large sum of money, and he (Mr. Archer) believed that they got the rails at the same price as they would have got them if Mr. Thomassen had never been to the colony. With regard to freights he had another word to say, because the hon. member for North Brisbane stated, and stated truly, that they were paying a higher average for freight than they had done previously. That was in one sense true, but he did not see any truth in the inference drawn from it—in fact, he thought that the hon. member had not considered the circumstance properly. He would refer to the evidence and bring to the hon. member's notice something which would prove to him that the freight was not excessive—that, in fact, considering the whole circumstances of the time, it was lower than they could have expected to get it. He was not now going to enter into the question of this combination of brokers at home. It was a matter which he did not fully understand; but of this he was quite satisfied that when the different shippers concerned in the Queensland trade were all of them asked to tender for freight there would be no such thing as a combination; as their special interest in their own business would override everything like a combination, and they would try to get a contract if they could quite irrespective of any combination. He was certain that the ship-owners of London when tendering for freight tried to cut each other out, and would always do their best to get the freight for themselves. The question of a brokers' association therefore, in his opinion, had nothing to do with the question of freight in this instance; each firm tendered for itself, and the one that tendered

lowest got it. If hon. members would turn to the evidence given by Mr. Forrest, they would see that a decided change had come over the condition of shipping in Brisbane. For example, it was in evidence that there was much less dead-weight wanted now than hitherto—that was to say, the imports into Queensland of iron, lead, and other things of that kind gave a largely increased amount of dead-weight; so that rails were not so much in demand as they used to be for that purpose. If hon. members would turn to question 2311 they would find the following:—

"Are not the rails that come to the Queensland Government very much relied upon for providing dead-weight for ships coming to this country? Not always.

"I say 'very much'? No. It depends, as a matter of course, what dead-weight is in the market. As a matter of fact, there is a good deal of dead-weight independently of the Queensland Government—iron, lead, and so forth, which are preferred to rails.

"What is the state of the shipping trade, now?—are there plenty of sailing ships to do all the freight-carrying here? Just now?

"Yes? From London here?

"Yes? At present, there are.

"And have been, for some time? No; at this particular season. It is more than likely there always will be, at this season of the year. This is the wool season;—ships come here and get a cargo back;—there is a greater inducement for ships to come here.

"That is so, every year, is it not? During the season, yes."

It was therefore evident that there was a greater chance at this season, but the witness proved conclusively that rails were not so much in demand for dead-weight as they used to be. Then again, in question 2346 he was asked:—

"By the Chairman: What is about the rate for dead-weight from London to Brisbane? At the present time, 25s. to 30s. per ton, for parcels—for instance, lead. Two to three years ago, we paid 15s.

"It has nearly doubled, then? Yes; in that particular line.

"By Mr. Macrossan: Is that for berth ships? That is for general cargo ships;—berth ships.

"By Mr. Perkins: What is the rate for general merchandise? What do you mean by general merchandise?—do you mean case goods—spirits, drapery—?"

"Yes? From 32s. 6d. to 40s.;—sometimes more, 45s."

The member for North Brisbane included rails by berth-ships in the average above which the colony was now paying for freight. He (Mr. Archer) believed some money might have been saved; and he had already said that he thought it was a mistake that more rails were not kept back for dead-weight; but it was proved that it would not have been possible to have brought anything like the whole quantity of rails in berth-ships in anything like the time in which they were wanted; and for full-cargo ships the price paid under the circumstances was exceedingly moderate; and if the hon. member for North Brisbane would add the 15s. per ton on to dead-weight, and calculate what the average freight with such addition would formerly have been, he would see that the price paid now was practically below, rather than above, the average. In the figures used by the hon. gentleman in order to make an average there were calculations as to berth ships and full-cargo ships. For berth ships they were paying from 15s. to 16s. per ton at the time referred to; but this year they were paying 25s. to 30s. per ton. If the hon. gentleman would therefore remember that the freights for berth ships had nearly doubled since his figures were drawn out, he would see that the amount of freight for full-cargo ships was really not unreasonable. Before sitting down he would say a few words respecting what the hon. member for Maryborough had said of the administrative capacity of the Minister for Works. As far as he had observed he had seldom seen a Minister who was more devoted to his work than the hon. Minister for Works was, and if he had made a mistake, as

was admitted, it was not a great or glaring mistake. It was a mistake certainly to enter into the agreement with Mr. Thomassen, but the hon. gentleman did it from the very anxiety he felt to get rails for the colony as cheap as possible, and it was not a mistake for which the country had to pay. Indeed, if Mr. Thomassen had not been in the colony the rails would not have been bought in England until the Premier had arrived there, and then the result would have been precisely the same. The price of rails had risen very rapidly, and this was one of those things that could not be foreseen. As to the administrative capacity of the Minister for Works, that hon. gentleman would bear comparison with any of his predecessors; and he (Mr. Archer) would be very sorry indeed to see even the hon. member for Maryborough in his place. One subject was introduced by the hon. member for Enoggera which ought not to have been brought forward, viz., the action of the Ministers as to the commission of inquiry. The hon. gentleman had no right to request the Ministry to state to-night during this debate what they intended to do as to carrying out the investigation in London. That question would arise in another debate, and the House ought not to be called upon to waste its time in discussing it now. It was for the Ministry to bring forward their own proposal, and when that was done the House could either accept what was proposed or indicate their wishes in the matter. The manner in which the investigation was to be held could only be dealt with on a substantive motion, and that of course would be fully debated when it was proposed. He (Mr. Archer) was convinced that the matter of the rails was simply a commercial transaction, and this was proved by the anxiety expressed by Mr. Andrew McIlwraith as to what was to be done in the matter. It was evident that he was not aware of the exact nature of the bargain his partner had made; and he would repeat, once for all, his opinion that it was quite a commercial transaction. There was only one other question which had been raised by the hon. member for North Brisbane, who said that if Mr. Andrew McIlwraith ordered the rails as agent for the Queensland Government, the Queensland Government had a claim. Probably that was so, but nothing had been stated in evidence to show that Mr. McIlwraith was acting as an agent for the Queensland Government; nor, indeed, that anyone had been acting in that capacity. The agent of the Queensland Government was the Agent-General, and there was no other. Still, as the hon. member for North Brisbane said, there would be a claim if anyone purchased the rails as an agent of the Queensland Government. There ought to be inquiry. There were other matters which required to be inquired into, and no doubt would be inquired into, and he hoped and believed that the Government would take steps to make the inquiry a thorough one, else there was no use in beginning it at all. That was the opinion of the whole House, and he believed of the Government too. By the adoption of the report they would put the Ministry in a position to state what steps they would take to carry out the inquiry.

Question—That the report be adopted—put and passed.

The PREMIER announced that to-morrow he would probably take the Pacific Island Labourers Bill, the Burrum Railway Bill, and the Insanity Bill; and that if any pressing business came down from the other Chamber, that of course would take precedence.

The House adjourned at thirteen minutes to 10 o'clock.