

## REPORT OF THE TELEGRAPH ENQUIRY COMMITTEE.

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THE Select Committee appointed "to examine into the whole question of the working and management of the Electric Telegraph Department with power to call for persons and papers, but not to have power to inspect telegrams or to examine officers as to the contents thereof," have considered the matters to them referred, and have agreed to the following Report :—

The Committee resolved to investigate all specific charges which had been preferred against the Telegraph Department, and invited information in every direction where discontent was known to have been expressed, with a view to the fullest investigation of the grounds of complaint. The Committee also examined Ministers and officers connected with the Department as to the conduct of the Department.

The accusations against the Department resolved themselves into four distinct charges,—

- (1.) That known as the Bluff Telegram case, being the information received by the steamer "Gothenburg" on the 29th September, 1870.
- (2.) The Hokitika telegram case in reference to the alleged detention of the *Evening Post* telegram on the 8th and 9th September, 1870.
- (3.) The Timaru telegram case.
- (4.) The charge of Ministerial misuse of the Department.

1. The Committee have to report, with respect to the first charge, in which the Government were accused of misappropriating the *Otago Daily Times* telegram for their own information, and of wrongfully conveying the information so obtained to that portion of the press which supported them, that the evidence adduced on the part of the principal accuser and of the Department proves the charge to be entirely without foundation. In the opinion of the Committee the Department acted with impartiality and probity, and the information obtained by the Government on that occasion was derived from ordinary and proper sources.

2. The charge of designedly detaining the *Evening Post* telegram sent from Hokitika on the 8th September, 1870, is proved by the evidence to be entirely unfounded.

3. In the Timaru telegram case, the Minister temporarily in charge of the Department exceeded, as admitted by himself, his authority as Commissioner in obtaining a copy of Mr. Stafford's speech. The Committee consider this a breach of the rules, which should not be repeated. The Committee would at the same time observe that no personal imputation rests on the Hon. the Acting Commissioner in connection with this case, with respect to which an explanation has been given to and accepted by the House.

4. The charge of Ministerial misuse of the Department resolved itself into a charge of Ministers having franked telegrams which should have been paid for. The Committee examined Ministers in respect to the practice of franking telegrams. It appears from the evidence given, that during the late elections a few telegrams were franked by Ministers in matters relating to the elections. For the future the Committee recommend that such telegrams should be considered of a private nature.

The Committee have arrived at the following conclusions, founded upon the evidence taken :—

(1.) That the Telegraph Department has been fairly and honestly conducted, and has been eminently worthy of public confidence.

(2.) That the accusations have been founded entirely on misconceptions and inferences drawn from supposed occurrences which are proved not to have taken place.

(3.) That the principal accuser of the Government and the Telegraph Department (Mr. Barton), should have continued to use the press in reiterating the charges, even after evidence was in his possession which should have disabused his mind—shows, in the opinion of the Com-