

to the criticisms of the public Press. Probably if the Commissioners were constituted the Harbour Board and intrusted with its functions, with power to spend the balance of funds at its disposal, they would snub any Government, local body, or even Sir John Coode himself, did he dare even to suggest that by carrying out their opposition harbour scheme they would divert the Buller River, ruin the port, and waste balance of our authorised loan.

Second Letter.

2. Whatever may be the object of the Commissioners in claiming to have supplied the design of the addition to the staiths, the fact remains that there is nothing original in the design, which has been, as you will see, adapted from the first design used; and you will also see that it has been prepared at Greymouth by the officers of your department. I believe the Commissioners have the responsibility of advocating and approving the work with all its faults. The sheath-piling they now condemn as useless and unnecessary, and, I have no doubt, such is the honest conviction of those gentlemen, and this is an episode which illustrates the inconvenience and undesirability of allowing irresponsible persons, wanting practical experience, arbitrarily to interfere or have control from a distance in the execution of works which they do not understand. For the previously erected portion of the staiths similarly situated, the pile-sheathing was deemed necessary and useful by the "dummy" Board, the Government, the Engineer-in-Chief, the Governor in Council, and no doubt also by the Commissioners who are now in contradiction. But, as before explained, the piling could not be made entirely effective. No later than last month the diver had to be again employed lifting stones which had slipped out and were dangerous to shipping. An additional provision is now being made at considerable expense to close up all the openings. This Board, from experience derived from intimate acquaintance with facts and upon the reports of their officers, have forwarded plans and particulars for this work, which is recommended as necessary. I now enclose herewith copies of reports and letters, with cross-sections of the river-bank, which will enable the Government to decide whether the work shall proceed or not. In case of damage to a steamer by stones rolling off the bank into the berthage, a vessel might again be sunk, even as the s.s. "Westport" was sunk alongside the staiths. You will remember the colony paid for that, with the costs of a law suit added. In such a case the Board, not the Commissioners, would be liable. Then, would it not be culpable neglect on the Board's part to ignore the circumstances and withhold the suggestion, which after all amounts to this, that the new work requires the same protection which in practice has been found indispensable for the old?

4. The Board anticipate a considerable extension of trade and revenue from the connection of new mines with the port and the great improvement in the harbour, consequently both the railway traffic and the shipping will require greater facilities. In no way can those facilities be provided more efficiently or economically than as suggested. Before presenting the proposal for the sanction of Government the Board decided to have the plans presented to the Railway Commissioners in order that the wharf, which would when completed be handed over for working to them, might in every way meet their views. A reply to this courteous application has been sent by a letter (copy enclosed) which is worth perusal, as showing to what extent in the assumption of authority the Commissioners are prepared to go, unless a short Act be passed by Parliament to define their position. Previously the Board have been charged with obstructing the railway works; now their offence is that they wish to facilitate it; then comes the hysterical exclamation, "the Board has really no jurisdiction over the railway wharves or staiths." No one ever said that it has. It is not equally true to say that the Board is not concerned in "their working," since it has to find the money for their construction and depends upon their returns for revenue. The Commissioners might as well inform the Parliament and the people that they are not concerned in the working of the New Zealand Railways. Perhaps the Commissioners are of that opinion. It will appear to you strange, but this refers to a wharf extension, a part of Sir J. Coode's harbour plan, and included in the recommendation made by the late Marine Engineer, which you so kindly placed at the disposal of this Board. His words were: "'F' extension of railway wharf down to coal-staiths, and dredging alongside to requisite depth, also providing cranes thereon for coal-loading, as at Greymouth." The matter has been further brought under our consideration by the manifest want of sufficient berthage for vessels, illustrated lately on the occasion of a heavy flood in the Buller, accompanied by bad weather at sea. Sufficient safe moorings were not obtainable, three large vessels were moored abreast at the coal-staiths. To any one who has cognisance of this river in flood nothing further need be said. For other reasons also the Board considered the time opportune for making progress in this direction upon the accepted and established plan of works. Complaints have been numerous that the coal shipped at Westport is much injured and reduced in quality by the system of loading from the staiths, under which the coal is shot down from a height into the holds of ships. The process breaks up the coal, and reduces much of it to dust, unfit for household use. The Board have now a number of cranes at the quarries which will soon be to spare; four of these, which have cost about £6,000, could (being placed on part of the proposed wharf extension) be utilised for the shipment of household coal, and thus reduce the breakage to a minimum, and at the same time insuring quick despatch to vessels. The cranes have been tested, with the result of establishing their adaptability for the work to the extent of 120 tons each per hour, equal for the four to 3,000 tons for six hours, which is more than could be put out on the staiths, which cost £15,000. The language of this, as in previous paragraphs, is ambiguous and full of self-assertion. I would like to know whether it is meant to convey a threat of interference with harbour works. If so, it will be necessary to set that question at rest or the Commissioners may become obstructive. Our reading of the legal position is, that the authority of Commissioners extends to the railway premises, wharves, staiths, &c., but not beyond that. If we are mistaken then it becomes quite possible for the Commissioners, in an arbitrary way, to set aside the scheme adopted for this port, substituting some experi-