

WILLIAM FLEMING, sworn.

131. *Mr. Purnell.*] You are a farmer?—Yes, living at Ashburton.
 132. You remember this fire, do you?—Yes.
 133. I think you were standing with Mr. Moore when the fire commenced?—Yes.
 134. Did you see the express coming along?—Yes.
 135. Before the express came along, was there any sign of fire?—No.
 136. When did you first see signs of fire?—Directly after the express had passed. Mr. Moore drew my attention to the smoke.
 137. That is, directly the express had passed the plantation, he drew your attention to it?—I do not know where the plantation starts, but it was in a straight line from where we were looking.
 138. Where was the smoke you saw?—Close behind the train.
 139. Was it between the railway-line and the plantation?—I could not say exactly. It seemed to be on the line.
 140. What conclusion did you come to at that time, as to the origin of the fire?—That sparks had come out of the engine. Mr. Moore had just been saying to me that he always dreaded fire from the engines on account of the sparks.
 141. Did the fire spread rapidly?—Yes.
 142. There was a strong nor'-wester blowing?—Yes.
 143. I think you visited the place where the fire was supposed to have started some time afterwards?—About a month afterwards I passed in the train, and I saw where it had been burnt.
 144. Where was it?—Close up to the line.
 145. Was it near the plantation?—Yes.
 146. From what you saw did you conclude it had started between the line and the plantation?—Yes.
 147. What was the nearest point of the fire from the railway-line?—I think it had burnt close up.
 148. Of course, outside the line there is a certain amount of space occupied by the gravel?—Yes. It had burnt close up to the gravel.
 149. Had you seen Mr. Moore's fences before the fire took place?—No.
 150. Did the fire burn his fences and grass?—Yes.
 151. How far is the spot where you and Mr. Moore were standing from the line?—About 30 or 40 chains.
 152. You could not see sparks from that distance?—No.
 153. *Mr. Cresswell.*] You concluded that it was sparks from the engine that ignited the grass?—Yes.
 154. As a matter of fact, you did not see any sparks?—No.
 155. And assuming the fire came from the train, you could not see whether it came from a spark, or from a lighted match or a cigar thrown from the carriages?—That might have been so; but the fire started, it appeared to me, while the train was passing.
 156. How far was the train from the fire when you first saw it?—3 or 4 chains.

SAMUEL HORSNALL, sworn.

157. *Mr. Purnell.*] You are a railway guard?—Yes.
 158. I think you were the guard on the south express on the 27th January, 1898?—I tried to find my own memorandum relating to that fact last night, but I could not. I am told, however, that I was the guard.
 159. Do you accept the official statement on the point?—Yes.
 160. Do you remember a fire on that date?—I do not; it is too far back. Whenever there is a fire I take action, and I have no doubt I did so on that day.
 161. *Mr. Poynton.*] Have you any knowledge of that particular fire?—I believe I threw a note out to the men on that day to attend to it.
 162. Did you make a report on the fire?—Yes, afterwards.
 163. You were called on to do so?—Yes. It is as follows: "I beg to state that as express was passing the plantation on the left of the track south of Hinds station on, I believe, 27th January, Mr. Clark, Bridge Inspector, of Timaru, who was in the van, drew my attention to some smoke that was then arising in the plantation about 3 chains from the train. There was a strong north-west wind blowing. Two gangs of platelayers were sent back to attend the fire."
 164. Did you see the fire start?—No. My attention was called to the smoke, but we were then some distance away from it.
 165. You saw no smoke before you arrived at the plantation?—No.
 166. Do you know anything more about it?—No; only that I sent the platelayers back, if that is the time the inquiry is about.
 167. Did you see any sparks flying about?—No.
 168. You do not know how the fire originated?—No.
 169. What you do know is that before you arrived at the plantation there was no smoke?—I could not say anything about that. I was busy at work in the van, and when my attention was called to the fire I looked out and saw it. I saw the smoke rising.
 170. You were busy at work, and after you passed the plantation you saw the smoke rising?—Yes.
 171. *Mr. Cresswell.*] Was Mr. Clark in the train with you?—Yes.
 172. In the van?—Yes.
 173. When passing the spot you would be in the van?—Yes.
 174. And you would not be likely to see the fire, if there was any fire, until your attention was drawn to it?—That is so.