

341. *Mr. Cooper.*] I have here the report of Ganger Farrell to Inspector Day, about the fire in the wattle plantation. It is as follows.—

SIR,—

17th December, 1896.

I have to report that a fire occurred at 52 miles on Tuesday, the 15th instant, some time through the day, on the east side of the line. A south-west wind was blowing at the time. The fire travelled across a large swamp, and into Mr. Young's plantation, burning several acres of wattle. There are several Maori camps close where the fire took place. The Maoris are in the habit of burning-off for the purpose of gum-digging. Since the fire the Maoris have left the place. I am inclined to think they are the cause of the fire.

Inspector Day.

—Yes, that is the report.

DENNIS HOGAN, SWORN.

342. *Mr. Cooper.*] You are a ganger in the employment of the Railway Department?—Yes.

343. And you were so in 1898?—Yes.

344. Do you recollect a fire taking place on the 13th of January, 1898?—I have a remembrance of a fire.

345. It was at Mr. Wallace's place?—Yes.

346. Your report is as follows:—

Auckland Section: Maintenance Department.

Date of fire: 13th January, 1898.

Time first noticed: 5.7 p.m.

Mileage: 10 m. 55 ch., main line.

Started inside or outside railway boundary: Outside.

Left- or right-hand side of line going from Auckland: Left.

Direction of wind: Westerly.

Last train to pass: No. 45; time, 5.7 p.m.

Extent of damage done: To private property, 15 acres of paddock that hay had recently been made off.

Owner of property: J. Wallace.

Extent of damage done to railway property: Nil.

Origin of fire (if known): Don't know.

D. HOGAN, Ganger.—14th January, 1898.

—Yes, that is my report.

347. You did not see the fire originate?—No.

348. You know the regulations, 190 to 198, as to the prevention of fires: are they faithfully carried out?—Yes.

349. And, so far as you and your men can do, they take all steps to put out fires?—Yes. We burn off the grass inside the railway boundary.

350. That was so in 1898, and is so still?—Yes.

351. I think you are specially careful during the dry season?—Yes.

352. *Mr. Brookfield.*] Is it a fact that there are a considerable number of fires during the dry season alongside Mr. Wallace's place?—I have noticed several.

353. Just after trains passing?—I could not swear that to a certainty.

354. Have you noticed any at other times than when a train was passing?—Yes; I saw one at Otahuhu.

355. But have you not seen fires at Wallace's, and always after the passing of a train?—I have seen Mr. Wallace setting fire himself on a road between Mr. Yates's property and his own.

356. But have not a lot of fires occurred on Wallace's property just after the passing of a train?—Yes, that is quite true.

357. Have you on any occasion been able to discover any other reason for those fires except sparks from the engines?—On one occasion I noticed a fire on the Mangare Road. It was started on a Sunday by somebody passing throwing a spark, and if I had not known the cause of that the engine would have been blamed. A man who saw it put it out at once.

358. You know that Mr. Wallace has complained?—Yes.

359. Have you ever discovered any other reason except sparks from engines for Mr. Wallace's fires?—I could not prove it.

360. Is it not a fact that several of the fires have occurred at some little distance from the railway-line itself, starting inside Mr. Wallace's fence?—The majority of them have, because it has been burnt between the centre of the track and the fence.

361. *Mr. Cooper.*] Burnt by the department?—Yes.

362. *Mr. Brookfield.*] Then you have every reason to believe that Mr. Wallace is correct when he says fires are caused by sparks?—Well, I suppose that is a reasonable conclusion to come to if there is no one about at the time.

363. Do you remember this fire?—Yes, perfectly well.

364. Did you estimate the damage at all?—I am not a practical farmer, but I have a fair idea of what the damage would be.

365. What do you think the damage was?—£3 or £4. It was grass land. The hay had been mown off.

366. Suppose the effect is to kill the grass, and that it has to be resown?—I have never seen it killed. Mr. Wallace lays his grass every two or three years. The crop is the same this year, pretty well.

367. Do you mean to say that Mr. Wallace resows his paddocks every two years?—Yes, I have noticed it. I have noticed that he ploughs his paddocks more often than other farmers.

368. Do you mean to say that he sows grass on his grass paddocks every two years?—He ploughs them up.

369. These practical farmers have said the damage would be £2 an acre. I suppose you have had no experience in the matter?—Well, after a shower of rain it is about the same as it was before. If you look at it now you would not see much difference.