

in other countries, that users of the roads (and motorists in particular) do disregard the warnings given them by the bells, &c. Quite recently I have had before me no less than four cases in which such warnings have been disregarded by motorists, and collisions with trains have resulted. In one of these the warning was conveyed by a crossing-keeper, and in the other three cases bells had been installed and were ringing as the motors were driven on to the crossing. Nor is this want of due care on the part of motorists peculiar to the use of railway level crossings. On the contrary, it is scarcely possible to read the newspapers from day to day without finding reports of motor accidents in no way connected with the railway. For instance, in the City of Christchurch alone, in December of last year twenty-one collisions occurred between tram-cars and motor and other vehicles. The chairman of the Tramway Board, in commenting on the position, pointed out that many of the collisions were due to reckless driving on the part of the motorists. It is as well that these facts should be borne in mind when the question of allotting the blame arises in respect of an accident at a railway-crossing.

Cases such as I have mentioned where warnings are disregarded can be met only by the infliction on offenders of such penalties as will bring home to them the fact that, even if they are willing to jeopardize their own safety, they cannot be permitted to take liberties with that of other persons—namely, the users of the railway—who, in the circumstances, have no control over the actions of the offenders.

ROAD COMPETITION.

The question of road competition has been emphasized in New Zealand as elsewhere by the increased use of motor transport, though any diminution of earnings due to this cause has been mainly in regard to short-distance traffic.

The fact that motor-vehicles have practically free use of the highways has been to a great extent responsible for the growth of this form of competition. In the case of railways the cost of construction of the running-track is charged up to a Capital Account, upon which the Department is expected to pay interest at the rate of $3\frac{3}{4}$ per cent., and the cost of the maintenance of the track, which averages £342 per mile per annum, is debited to working-expenses, whereas the owners of motor-vehicles are under no initial expense in the matter of a running-track and contribute little or nothing to the upkeep of the highways which their vehicles damage so seriously.

This disability is not the only one that the railways suffer in competition with motor-vehicles. For many years the railways have carried at unremunerative rates road-metal for local bodies, and this metal has been used mainly in the construction and upkeep of the roads which are now being so freely used and so badly damaged by motor-vehicles. The irony of the situation is to be found in the fact that in respect of the country roads at least their upkeep depends almost entirely on a regular supply of road-metal, a large proportion of which is carried by rail at a direct loss to the Railway Department of some £50,000 per annum.

SUPERANNUATION FUND.

The report and balance-sheet of the Railways Superannuation Fund for the 31st March, 1923, give the following figures :—

Annual liability	£	163,387	Members' contributions	£	128,937
			Fines and donations		577
			Interest		26,175
			Deficit (to be paid out of Government subsidy)		7,698
		<u>£163,387</u>			<u>£163,387</u>

On the 31st March, 1923, the liability of the fund to contributors in respect of amounts	£
paid by them was	917,154
The total accumulated fund was	584,219
Deficit	£332,935

The total subsidies paid to the various Government Superannuation Funds are as follows :—

Name of Fund.	Years in Existence.	Gross Subsidy.		Last Annual Payment.
		Date.	Amount.	
Railway	20	To 31st March, 1923 ..	£ 550,000	£ 75,000
Public Service ..	15	To 31st December, 1923 ..	846,500	86,000
Teachers	17	To 31st January, 1923 ..	335,583	68,000

The Railways Fund has now been established for twenty years. Its revenue is derived from contributions of members, fines and donations, interest on funds invested, and annual subsidy from the Government. The gross income from all sources from the inception of the fund till the 31st March, 1923, was £2,291,352; contributions, fines and donations, £1,500,664; interest, £240,688; Government subsidy, £550,000. Disbursements: Life allowance, £1,247,342; widows and children, £144,568; refunds of contributions, £302,656; compensation, £4,206; administrative charges, £8,361; balance, representing accumulated fund, £584,219.