

(No. 50.)



1874.

TASMANIA.
HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY.

MAIN LINE RAILWAY.

MR. GRANT'S LETTER.

Laid upon the Table by the Colonial Treasurer, and ordered by the House to be printed, July 31, 1874.



*Tasmanian Main Line Railway Company, Limited, Engineer's Office,
Hobart Town, Tasmania, 30th July, 1874.*

SIR,

FROM the newspaper report of your Financial Statement to the House of Assembly on the 29th instant, it would appear that you do not consider the Main Line Railway Company have fulfilled, or will eventually be able to fulfil, their Contract with the Government of Tasmania; and would not therefore, after the period allowed for the construction of the line has expired, be entitled to claim the annual subsidy payable to them under the Contract. I notice that this is stated as being your opinion, fortified by the statement of a gentleman who has reported to the Government upon the construction of the Railway; and afterwards, in the report of the *Mercury*, you are made to state that "the Engineer had reported that the Main Line Railway Company cannot fulfil its Contract."

Were these remarks simply the statements of a private individual I would not trouble you with any reply thereto, but coming from a very distinguished Member of the Tasmanian Government, and one who, as paying the guaranteed interest quarterly, would naturally be supposed by the public at large to be better acquainted with the proceedings of the Railway Company than any member of the Ministry, I feel that it is necessary in the interests of the Company, and for the protection of its property against the very undue depreciation in value that would follow the publication in England of your statements, to most emphatically protest that they are based on no solid grounds.

On the other hand I most unhesitatingly and positively assert that the Railway Company both have fulfilled, and will fulfil in the letter, (and more than fulfil in the spirit, by making a far better line than the terms of the specification necessarily provided,) the whole of the terms of the Contract with the Government; and confidently challenge the judgment of any competent authority who may be versed in such Contracts.

I would point out that the opinion to which you incline is from an Engineer, doubtless of great ability, integrity, and eminence in his profession, but entirely unaccustomed to negotiate or interpret such Contracts as that in question, and who has had no experience whatever in the construction of ordinary or light Railways, or in the use of the rolling stock especially adapted thereto. Furthermore, he had not the local knowledge to guide him that the Company's officers possess.

Your remarks I apprehend refer principally to the question of speed, on which I may observe that, with a full knowledge of the engineering features of the line, the Chairman of the Tasmanian Main Line Railway Company, also of the Isle of Man (a narrow-gauge, 3 ft. 6 in., Railway), and who further occupies the same position in, or is a Director of, a *great* number of Railways of various gauges in all parts of the world, including the gigantic London and North Western Railway (the largest and most important railway system in England), has written to inform me that the contract speed both can and will be maintained; the contractors for the line and the makers of the rolling stock guarantee it; and the Consulting Engineer for the Company—one of the very highest authorities on narrow-gauge railways, and connected with nearly all that are being constructed—assures me that he apprehends no difficulty in obtaining the speed required, and that some locomotives are being specially prepared for these express-trains. As regards the works of construction on the Railway, I can guarantee that they will be found thoroughly efficient for the very highest rate of speed that the gauge will permit.

There is an ambiguity in the report of your speech which might allow it to be understood as quoting my opinion against the attainment of the prescribed rate of speed. If so, I would remark, that I looked at the matter from the Railway Manager's point of view rather than an Engineer's; and being guided by experience, and the practical information afforded by the time-tables of all narrow-gauge Railways, I feel strongly the impolicy of running through express trains at the highest attainable rate of speed, and to the sacrifice of much local accommodation. Still, if any inconvenience accrue the remedy is in the hands of the Government, and the public are in every way the most interested in the result.

In alluding to the improvement of the branch roads from the townships to the Railway, you particularly mention that the House of Assembly had not approved the route. This remark I am at a loss to comprehend, because the Contract most specifically states that the route is to be determined by the only person who can possibly define it; namely, the Railway Company's Engineer. It would be a novel feature for a Legislative Assembly to set out the line of a Railway; and, so far as I know, the route of every Railway hitherto constructed has been fixed by the Engineer of the proprietary,—whether a Government or Public Company; nor do I see how this simple principle could be advantageously departed from.

Your remarks are the more calculated to injure the Company at this time, since they affect a property already enormously and wholly unnecessarily depreciated in value by the attacks made upon it in this country; and because, whether rightly or wrongly, there is now a strong feeling in England that the Government or Legislature of Tasmania have not acted fairly and in good faith to the Company in the matter of the promised remission of wharfage rates and other minor matters, in which the Company, when undertaking the Contract, relied upon the honor of those they negotiated with to fulfil all their agreements, whether expressed or implied.

As the Company's interests might be most seriously imperilled by your observations respecting them being allowed to remain unchallenged, I beg to request that you will consent to the immediate publication of this letter.

I have the honor to be,
Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

CHARLES H. GRANT.

Hon. P. O. Fysh, M.H.A., Colonial Treasurer.