

Mr. BLAIN. What were the regular officials doing when all this stealing of mail bags was going on?

Mr. EMMERSON. Mr. Skeffington was a regular official and I am telling you what he was not doing. It was his duty to go all over the line and see that the police and other officers were attending to their duty.

Mr. BLAIN. But there is a regular staff of officials in charge of these mail bags.

Mr. EMMERSON. They do not look after larcenies.

Mr. BLAIN. What were the regular officials doing who had charge of these mail bags, when, as the minister has stated, they were being stolen day after day?

Mr. EMMERSON. These mail bags were taken off the train and put in sight of the officials on the platform but the mail bags were stolen. I do not say that Mr. Skeffington should have stood there and watched them, but if he is a good detective surely in some one of these cases he would have discovered the thief and had him prosecuted. He ought to have some knowledge of suspicious characters being round there. That is only one illustration. The difficulties got to be so serious that I had to dispense with Mr. Skeffington's services. I am sorry that my hon. friend has referred to this. I did not wish to expose Mr. Skeffington before the public or do him any injury; but these are the facts.

Mr. R. L. BORDEN. It seems to me that the minister has not paid very much of a compliment to the persons who are in charge of the road when he describes in the glowing terms that he has used the extraordinary condition of stealing which he says is going on all over the Intercolonial without much check except that of a single detective. It is utterly impossible to expect that a detective placed at Moncton will prevent stealing at St. John.

Mr. EMMERSON. He is expected to be all over the line.

Mr. R. L. BORDEN. He cannot be all over the line at the same time, and while he is at Moncton I suppose it would be possible for people with thieving propensities to steal goods at Sydney or Halifax or elsewhere. I would be very much disinclined to believe that any such radical change could be effected simply by substituting some other person for Mr. Skeffington. However that may be, it is pretty clear that Mr. Skeffington's services were dispensed with almost immediately after he had made a report of the loss of postage stamps at Moncton.

Mr. EMMERSON. Oh, no, it was long after.

Mr. R. L. BORDEN. It was a very short time afterwards. An officer of the depart-

ment went there and came back with very little information on the subject, except that he said the system of checking was not very good, that the loss of the stamps could not be traced to any particular officer. That does not indicate that the investigation was of the most thorough character. Assuming that an incapable person such as Mr. Skeffington has been described to be should ascertain that postage stamps had been stolen, one would have supposed that this miracle of efficiency who has taken his place would have found out who had stolen them; but no great effort seems to have been made to ascertain that. One would have supposed that it was a matter deserving of particular investigation, because the loss of the stamps seems to have been associated with some person or persons connected with the road.

With regard to the other matter to which the minister has referred, I do not think the country would be inclined to pass by so lightly the expenditure to which he has alluded. It may be that the minister has no very great pecuniary interest in the old company in New Brunswick to which reference has been made; but assuming that his interest is of the smallest possible character, it is a very bad precedent indeed that a minister of the crown should direct one of his officers, with a certain qualification which does not amount to very much, to buy goods for the Intercolonial Railway from that company. I would have thought that a careful and sensitive minister of the crown would have been about the first person to direct his officer not to buy goods from any company in which he was interested. But the minister is not only prepared to make a recommendation to his officers, which is in effect a command, to buy goods from a company in which he has a direct personal interest, but he is prepared to stand up in this House and say that that is a proper thing to do. Well, I do not think it will be regarded by the public as the proper thing to do. Even assuming that the goods were bought at a fair price, at a price at which it was impossible to get goods of equal quality and value elsewhere, still I do not think the precedent is a good one. Suppose we had six or eight ministers of the crown in the great spending departments of this country directing particular officers in a dozen different sub-departments to buy goods from a particular company in which the minister in charge of the department happened to be personally interested, does the hon. gentleman think that would be a desirable condition of affairs to prevail in the public service? For my part, if that is his view, I am not inclined to agree with him. I think it is regrettable that the incident took place to which attention has been drawn, and I sincerely trust that it will not occur again.