

Retiring Commonwealth Railways Commissioner Honored.

VALEDICTORY TO MR. NORRIS G. BELL, C.B.E., M. INST. C.E.

Memorial Tablet Unveiled by the Hon. T. Paterson.

A function which will long be remembered as most unique in Railway history, was witnessed on Monday last, 24th. June, when a large gathering, representative of every branch of Commonwealth Railway men and their families and towns people generally, assembled at the station buildings, Port Augusta, on the occasion of the unveiling of a tablet which had been erected to commemorate the services rendered by the Retiring Commonwealth Railways Commissioner, Mr. Norris G. Bell, C.B.E. M. Inst. C.E.

The newly-appointed Commissioner Mr George A. Gahan, was in the chair, and, in addition to the guest of honor, there were seated on the dais with him, the Honorable Thomas Paterson, M.P., Minister of State for Markets and Transport, and Mr. Edward Simms, Secretary, Commonwealth Railways.

The proceedings opened with the Song of Australia, sung by the gathering, after which Mr. Gahan, in introducing Mr. Paterson, referred to the great pleasure it gave him to preside over such a representative gathering assembled to bid farewell to Mr. Bell. Mr. Gahan apologised for the absence of Mr. W. L. Artlett, Chief Traffic Manager, who, owing to important duties in North Australia, could not be present, but who asked him to express his regret at his enforced absence, and assuring them that he is with them all in the spirit of the meeting. Mr. Gahan stated that each section of the Railways activities was represented at the meeting, and they desired to voice their felicitations and to express their appreciation of Mr. Bell.

Mr. J. Wishart, representing the Way & Works section, thanked Mr. Bell for the kindly consideration he had always given to their modest requirements. They realised that, owing to Mr. Bell's capable administration, the pre-conceived notion that

the Trans-Australian line was destined to be a white elephant, had been falsified, and a most gratifying measure of success had been achieved. On behalf of the fitters he wished their guest long life and happiness, and in doing so they also desired to offer congratulations to him on the well-merited distinction conferred by His Majesty the King. He extended to Mr. Gahan their best wishes on his appointment as Commissioner, and trusted that under his capable administration the same progress would be maintained.

Mr. Geo. McAuley, for the Workshops Staff, said that he appreciated the opportunity of representing the Port Augusta Workshops at this pleasant function. They were gratified at the honor that had been bestowed on Mr. Bell which could not have been placed on better shoulders. They hoped that Mr. Bell's contemplated visit to Scotland would so invigorate him in health that he would return with renewed vigor to enjoy his many years which all trusted were before him. The Workshops staff, in saying farewell to Mr. Bell, wished to tender their congratulations to his successor.

Mr. T. Chinnery desired to extend to Mr. Bell, on behalf of the Traffic section, their very best wishes and their appreciation of the kindly treatment always received by the staff. Their Railways were second to none, and the sound position of the Commonwealth Railways was due to his guidance. The staff felt a personal pleasure that this was so, and this was doubtless a source of much gratification to Mr. Bell. They joined in congratulation of the signal honor bestowed by the King, and, with the other sections of the service, wished their new Commissioner every success in his administration.

Mr. H. Griffen, (Loco Running Section) voiced the appreciation felt

Section) voiced the appreciation felt for the many acts of kindness shown by Mr. Bell, especially to those resident in the more isolated portions of the Railways. Mr. Bell's periodical visits of inspection were always welcomed, and his unfailing courtesy was a feature of his administration. Not only had the Trans-Australian line vindicated its existence under Mr. Bell's management, but much money had been saved in connection with the Central Australian Railway

because of his wise foresight. Mr. Griffen expressed the desire that Mr. Bell would enjoy many years of good health in order that he may see the success of the organization on the foundations which he had so ably laid. He also desired to extend to Mr. Gahan their congratulations on his appointment.

Mr. W. Butchart spoke on behalf of the Clerical Division and North Australia and Canberra sections. They all recognised the sterling qualities of Mr. Bell, and were very pleased that this tablet had been erected during his life time and in his presence. His able work as Commissioner had placed him in the forefront of railway administrators in Australia. They thanked him for his kindly consideration of all matters pertaining to the Staff, and were delighted that he had been honored by the King. He desired to extend congratulations to Mr. Gahan as the new Commissioner.

Mr. W. C. Crowle, speaking for the Port Augusta Sub-Branch of the R.S.A., thanked Mr. Bell for the square deal he had always given to members of the League. He was also pleased that the new Commissioner was an Australian and a "Digger."

Municipal Tribute.

Mr. K. H. Hunter, Mayor of Port Augusta, said that he represented the municipality of Port Augusta, in expressing to Mr. Bell their appreciation of the many kindnesses he had extended. The Commonwealth Railways had made Port Augusta into a prosperous town. Mr. Bell's administration was responsible for the electric lighting of the town. They all desired that Mr. Bell would have many happy years ahead, and it

they all wished him to have many happy years ahead, and it would always give them great pleasure to meet him again in Port Augusta. He would ask Mr. Bell to convey their very best wishes to Mrs. Bell. In congratulating Mr. Gahan on his appointment he wished him every success in the maintenance of the high standard achieved by Mr. Bell.

"Turning of the Sod" Recalled.

Mr. Beerworth, Mayor of Port Augusta West said that they had come together to bid farewell to one of the most outstanding figures in Australia to-day. He remembered the turning of the sod in Port Augusta and the completion of the line from Port Augusta to Kalgoorlie. During the years, governments had come and gone, but one man had remained at his job, and that man was the retiring Commissioner. He thought the success of the Railway was partly due to the co-operation of the employees. He expressed his satisfaction on behalf of the people of Port Augusta West in the honor conferred on Mr. Bell by the King. When in turn Mr. Gahan came to lay down the responsibilities of the position of Commonwealth Railways Commissioner, he sincerely hoped that his successor would be another Port Augusta man. In conclusion, Mr. Beerworth conveyed to Mr. Bell the very best wishes of the people of Port Augusta West.

Mr. H. R. Holds, Mayor of Davenport, also expressed his very best wishes to Mr. Bell, referring to the very pleasant relations which had existed between the Commonwealth Railways Commissioner and that municipality. They trusted that Mr. Bell's trip abroad would be of great benefit to him.

Mr. R. Thompson in the absence of the Mayor of Quorn, who regretted being unable to be present, represented that municipality, and said that the people of Quorn and district had always held Mr. Bell in high regard. Mr. Bell always gave full consideration to their quests, and had done whatever he could to meet them.

Mr. Edward Simms referred to the high esteem felt for Mr. Bell in the Head Office at Melbourne. After their daily association with Mr. Bell

their daily association with Mr. Bell for so many years they were perhaps best qualified to say just what Mr. Bell's administration had meant to the Commonwealth Railways. They would all miss him because of old associations. Right throughout Australia Mr. Bell was highly esteemed.

Besides his monumental work in connection with the Trans-Australian Railway, Mr. Bell had had the responsibilities of the Grafton to Kyogle Railway. They were sorry to lose Mr. Bell, yet glad indeed to find Mr. Gahan. They congratulated him on his promotion and would all be pleased to extend their best assistance to Mr. Gahan as they had to Mr. Bell, and would work in the endeavor to make the Commonwealth Railways the high water mark in the railways of Australia.

The Chairman, Mr. Gahan, stated that before asking the Honorable the Minister to unveil the tablet, he desired to express his appreciation of the way in which all sections of the staff had responded to the invitation to recognise Mr. Bell's services as the first Commonwealth Railways Commissioner. The response had indeed been magnificent, and clearly indicated the very high esteem in which Mr. Bell was held by everyone connected with the Railways service. Subscriptions had been received from the staff of the Trans-Australian, Central Australia, and North Australia Railways, from the Melbourne and Canberra staff, and also from Messrs. G. Hober and T. H. Moyes who are now engaged with the North Australia Commission, but who previously were prominent members of the Commonwealth Railways staff. Mr. Gahan added that he was pleased to hear the remarks of the representatives of the various sections who had spoken that evening, and also from those gentlemen representing the municipalities. Mr. Bell would be pleased to know that he retired from office with the best wishes of the men who had worked under him and of all sections of the community. The function that evening had been well organised by the local committee, and the large assemblage present had made the ceremony the most gratifying success. He would now ask

made the ceremony a success. He would now ask the Honorable the Minister to unveil the tablet and also to make a presentation to Mr. Bell.

Apologies for unavoidable absence were also read from the Hon. T. Butterfield and Mr. H. W. Harvey, M's.P.

The Honorable Thomas Paterson, who apologised for the absence, through illness, of Mr. A. W. Lacey, M.H.R. for the District, said that he had known Mr. Bell for many years, and felt pleased to be present to show his respect on such an occasion. No greater tribute could be paid to any man on his retirement than to be surrounded by so many members of the railway service who represented every section of the service over which he had had control for many years. Mr. Bell was a Scotchman, born at Dundee and educated at Edinburgh. Later he had gained experience with an engineering firm in Glasgow and also with railway contractors, and then came to Australia to take up Railway work on the Queensland Railways. Among the big works carried out there, Mr. Bell had controlled the construction of the bridge over the Laura River, and many hundreds of miles of railway construction. He joined the Commonwealth Railways early in 1914 to take part in the linking of East and West. Mr. Bell had also had the control of the North Australia line, and was responsible for the extension of that Railway from Pine Creek to Birdum Creek, building an important bridge over the Katherine River, and the Oodnadatta—Alice Springs line. He had been responsible for the construction of over 2,000 miles of railway in Queensland and 1,500 miles of Commonwealth Railway; in all over 3,500 miles, or about one seventh of the total mileage of railway in Australia. The Commonwealth and State Governments had recently delegated their Railways Commissioners to work out the cost involved in unifying the railway gauges as compared with the cost estimated in 1922. Mr. Bell had been appointed Chairman of this Commission. Recently he (the Honorable the Minister) had been met by the Chairman of the Victorian Railways Commissioners, who had brought with him a letter signed by the whole of the State Commissioners

the whole of the State Commissioners saying that they had just learnt that

(Continued on Page 6.)

Valedictory to Railways Commissioner.

(continued from Page 1).

Mr. Bell would be retiring from the Railways Service, and requested that his services be retained as Chairman of the commission dealing with the uniformity of gauge, at least until that work was completed. Although the work would take six months, and Mr. Bell had started his retiring leave, he had agreed to carry on. During the War, Mr. Bell had done a lot of Red Cross work, and was a member of the Military Council as Military Director of Australian Railways. The honor conferred on Mr. Bell by His Majesty the King was justly deserved. It was also an honor to the employees of the Commonwealth Railways to have such a degree conferred on one who represented them. Mr. Paterson was pleased to have the honor to unveil a tablet as a recognition of Mr. Bell as a railwayman. It was rather unusual to give recognition during the lifetime of any person; such honors usually came after death; and in this the honor conferred on Mr. Bell was unusual and was perhaps parallel with the recognition conferred on Royce, also an engineer, who was somewhat similarly honored during his lifetime. Mr. Paterson then unveiled a handsome bronze tablet reading:—

"Norris G. Bell, C.B.E., M. Inst., C.E., Engineer in Chief 1914-1917—Controlling the construction of the Trans-Australian Railway, and First Commonwealth Railways Commissioner, 1917-1929. This Tablet was erected on his retirement by members of all sections of the Commonwealth Railways Staff as a token of the high esteem in which he was held and to commemorate his successful administration."

and to commemorate his successful administration."

He also presented Mr. Bell, on behalf of the Commonwealth Railways staff throughout Australia, a smokers outfit, and humorously remarked that "My Lady Nicotine" would be even more favored by the recipient in the future.

Mr. Bell's Response.

Mr. Bell, who was given an ovation on rising to respond, said that he found it difficult to suitably thank the speakers for their many kind remarks, and he appreciated this opportunity to say farewell. He had known many of those present since he became Engineer in Chief 15 years ago. He had been Commissioner for 12 years, and wondered how he would fill in his time with no definite occupation. He felt, however, like the man who said, "Don't mourn for me now, don't mourn for me never, I am going to do nothing for ever and ever." He regretted ceasing to be a railwayman, and a member of that great brotherhood of Railway men. He felt proud of his association with the Commonwealth Railways service, and was sure that it held its own with any railway service in the world. This undoubtedly was largely due to the keen interest taken in the railway by the men who worked it. He thought that this meeting was unique in Railway services, in that all sections of the Department were represented. He expressed his thanks for the tablet which he said was exactly what he would have desired most. The gathering to-night was sufficient assurance to him that what he had done had been appreciated. He was very grateful to them for the smoking outfit which would always be a reminder of the Commonwealth Railways, and of the men with whom he had worked in that service.

Before the gathering broke up, Mr. Gahan invited all present to proceed to the Davenport Hall, where a social evening would be held to conclude the ceremony.

The evening at the station concluded with the singing of "For he's a jolly good fellow" and the National Anthem.

Social and Dance.

Social and Dance.

The concert programme submitted at the Davenport Memorial Hall by Mrs. W. E. Male, the Port Augusta Male Voice Choir, the Mandolin Band, Messrs H. McDonald and V. Harcourt, was of a high standard, and thoroughly appreciated by one of the largest audiences ever seen in that hall. During the evening the Hon. the Minister handed to Mr. Bell for Mrs. Bell, a handsome diamond brooch. He said that every good man recognised the wonderful assistance of a good wife, and he was sure that Mrs. Bell had been a help-mate to Mr. Bell during their married life. Mr. Bell responded briefly on behalf of Mrs. Bell, and stated that it was somewhat of a coincidence that the presentation of the diamond brooch was made at a time which approximated very closely to the celebration of their diamond wedding.

After the musical programme supper was served by a committee of ladies, namely, Mesdames Potter, Male, Hodges, A. E. Higginson, Gill, Maclean, Snow, and Wilkinson. After supper the remaining hours till midnight were filled in by the younger folk dancing to music kindly provided by the Melodians Orchestra, Mr. W. E. Male, acting as M.C., and the National Anthem concluded a most enjoyable evening, which was undoubtedly a wonderful tribute to the popularity of Mr. Bell, and of his successful administration as Commonwealth Railways Commissioner.