

X RAILWAYS ABROAD.

Return of Mr. R. H. Chapman.

In pursuance of the policy of sending departmental officers abroad to acquire wider knowledge, the Chief Commissioner of Railways (Mr. W. A. Webb) has made it possible for a number of leading officials to visit England, Europe, and America—the lastnamed country being generally regarded as well to the fore in railway matters, and offering special interest to Australians by reason of the similarity of transport problems which exist in both countries. Last January Mr. R. H. Chapman (Chief Engineer for Railways), who had been selected for such a trip, left Adelaide on his mission, and travelled by way of South Africa, finishing up in America.

When interviewed upon his return on Thursday, Mr. Chapman said his visit was principally connected with railway maintenance and construction. He had been considerably impressed with the railways in South Africa. There was a uniform 3 ft. 6 in. gauge throughout the Union, and very much heavier rolling stock was used there than was the case in Australia. They used rails up to 80 lb. in weight, and jarrah sleepers imported from Western Australia. He saw hundreds of 50-ton trucks fully laden on the tracks, and in some parts there were very heavy grades and sharp curves, which were negotiated without difficulty. The ballasting and general navvy work was done by the natives, who worked very well. He visited Italy, France, and Germany, and, so far as passenger traffic was concerned, the railways on the Continent were good. In parts of Germany steel sleepers were used, but they were not as satisfactory as wood in the matter of resiliency.

It was difficult, said Mr. Chapman, to make a comparison between railways in Great Britain and those in Australia; for one reason there were numerous private sidings in England that precluded the use of larger and heavier rolling stock. He spent a brief time at Montreal, Canada, and then travelled down to America. In the middle and western States heavy loads were drawn, and he had observed trains of 60,000 lb. axle load running on 80-lb. rails, while the maximum corresponding axle load in Australia was 54,000 lb. In the eastern States of America the axle load went as high as 65,000. One of the main lines in Texas 85-in. rails were used for a 60,000-lb. axle load. There were principally Mountain and Pacific type of engines on the main railroads. He had travelled behind one of the latter type on a passenger train, and he timed the speed over a stretch of country, and for that distance the rate was on an average of 71 miles an hour. America had a similar problem to South Australia in certain parts, in the matter of big areas with sparse population, and they used bigger trucks than was the case here. That also applied in Canada. Throughout America softwoods were mainly used for sleepers, with a certain amount of oak timbers. The Australian jarrah sleepers were much stronger and stiffer, and therefore gave long service. In fact, they were equal to anything in the world.