

REPORT ON THE WORKING OF

advantages that have been purchased by this expenditure, viz., the selection of the best obtainable lines laid off with as few angles as possible, and the execution of the whole work of construction under the closest supervision so as to avoid defects which would hereafter, through inferior work, lead to accidents and expenses, are so great, that I am confident the money laid out for these purposes has been well spent.

Had this course not been adopted, there can be no doubt, that owing to the difficulties which have to be encountered in the construction of Telegraph lines through those parts of the Colony where the extensions are now in progress—difficulties arising chiefly from the absence of roads, the inaccessible character of the country, and also from a variety of contingencies which no human foresight could provide against—the works above alluded to would not have been in their present satisfactory state of progress.

At your request I have furnished in Appendix B a complete statement of the cost of the Main Trunk Line in the Middle Island; this statement gives the expenditure incurred in the erection of the different portions of this line, as also the cost of the Cook Straits Cable.

The cost per mile of the lines that have been recently erected will, on examination, compare very favourably on the score of economy with those erected on the Middle Island, especially when the superior quality of timber now used is taken into consideration.

MAINTENANCE AND REPAIRS OF LINES.

In order to supply a complete statement of the cost of maintenance, I have divided the line off into sections, and on reference to Appendix C it will be seen upon which sections of the line through the Middle Island, the outlay for maintenance has been chiefly incurred. The heavy floods which occurred in August, 1867, and in the month of February last, added considerably to the cost of maintaining the Telegraph between the Waitaki River and Nelson. The amount set down under the head of material, for the section between Waitaki and Christchurch, has apparently made that section costly as regards its total maintenance; the greater portion of this material, however, still remains unused, and considerable expense was incurred in the alteration of the wires in and about Christchurch, when the West Coast Line was taken over. The greatest outlay without any permanent advantage, was, I consider, on the section between Christchurch and Blenheim, as the repairs which we were forced to make in order to restore communication, will, in a few months, be rendered useless by the reconstruction of the line; the rotten state of the poles, the insecure manner in which the rivers on this section were spanned, and the exposed and rugged character of part of the country through which the line runs, caused this section to suffer more than any other. After its reconstruction, however, it will be one of the least expensive to maintain, as every care is being taken to ensure the stability and durability of the new work.

One of the chief sources of expense upon the section between Blenheim and Nelson, the greater part of which runs through birch forest, has been the constant falling of dead trees across the wires; this has now to a certain extent been remedied by removing from its vicinity any trees that would be likely, in falling, to come in contact with the line. I may add that the chain wide which was originally cleared of bush along this line has not been found sufficient owing to the great height of the standing timber. The poles on this section have in many places been renewed, and I do not anticipate that any very great expenditure for repairs will be required for some time to come.

The remaining portions of the line, viz., between the Bluff and the Waitaki, and Christchurch and Greymouth, require no special remark, as the expense attendant on repairs has not been greater than must be expected under ordinary circumstances. Before leaving this part of my report, I would respectfully suggest that another Inspector be appointed to act in conjunction with Mr. Bird; there can be no doubt that the rapidity with which extensive repairs were executed in February last were mainly owing to the energetic measures taken by that gentleman and Mr. Walter Blake, who happened to be in a position to render assistance at one of the places where it was most required. The Electrician to this Department, in the report on his recent inspection of the lines and stations in the Middle Island, speaks very favourably of the class of men who are engaged in performing the duties of Linemen. I may add that it has been found advisable to provide each Lineman with a horse, instead of giving them, as formerly, an allowance of ten shillings per diem when out on line duty; and from the experience of the last four months, I have every reason to be satisfied with the change, both on the score of economy and the greater certainty and expedition with which repairs are effected.

COMPLAINTS OF ERRORS, DELAYS, ETC.

The registered number of complaints made by the public during the year, is eleven; they may be classified as follows:—

Three telegrams reported as not received.

Five late delivered.

Three with errors in the wording.

Each of these complaints was strictly investigated, and the offender punished by a severe fine or otherwise.