

192. Would a company be prepared to commence operations simultaneously at different points on the line, so as to expedite the work?—No doubt private companies would agree to begin at each end. The nature of the line is such that economically it could only be carried out by simultaneous construction of earthworks at several points along its course. *Mr. J. Roberts.*
30th Aug., 1877.

193. *Mr. Macandrew.*] In the event of the line being extended to Lake Wanaka, and commenced at both ends, would not this offer greater facility for sleepers and other timber being supplied from the Hawea and Wanaka forests?—Timber might be got cheaper, I think, by coast. I doubt if the timber at Wanaka is sufficiently durable.

194. *Mr. De Lautour.*] Do you know the quantity of land which has been sold in this district?—I believe about 9,000 or 10,000 acres have been sold in the Strath Taieri, certainly not 40,000 acres.

195. Would the country between North Taieri and Blair Taieri be suitable for small farms?—I believe the land between North Taieri and Blair Taieri for about twenty-four miles could be cut up into grazing farms of from 1,000 to 1,500 acres each. At present the country is not considered agricultural land. The same remark might be applied to the country on the east side of the Taieri River. I do not consider that country as being wholly pastoral country. There is, on the east side, from 120,000 to 150,000 acres, which could be cut up into 1,000 acre sections with advantage. Snow never lies there for more than a day, and it is eminently adapted for settlement in moderate-sized sections. In each of the 1,000-acre blocks I should consider there might be a fourth or a fifth ploughable.

196. I understand you to say that on each of the 1,000-acre blocks to which you refer, from 100 to 200 acres would be found fit for agriculture?—Yes; good crops are grown 1,500 feet above the sea—oats and magnificent turnips. The high ground on the east side would not probably ripen wheat.

197. Would the low land you have spoken about grow wheat?—The land capable of being ploughed on the low ground I have spoken about would, I consider, grow wheat. I cannot speak from experience, but I am trying wheat myself this year in Strath-Taieri.

198. You consider that a company would make this line if a guarantee be given?—I think for a guarantee of 300,000 acres a company would be inclined to make a line from near Mr. Reid's corner, or the Chain Hills tunnel, at the junction of the main south line, to Clyde or Cromwell.

199. In the event of Government acceding to this project, would the company take land in different blocks?—The nature of the country is such that a block could not be taken good enough. Possibly the company would elect to take the land in 10,000-acre blocks, so as not to spot the country too much, at about one-third frontage on the line. Upon the first twenty-four miles a company would not care to exercise a pre-emptive right, as it is not land that would be greatly enhanced in value.

200. *The Chairman.*] Can you state whether the traffic, as estimated in the report of the Select Committee of the Otago Provincial Council, 1873, is accurate?—The report of the Select Committee of the Otago Provincial Council, 1873, on the proposed line to Cromwell *via* Clutha, estimates a traffic of 12,000 tons per year, exclusive of the traffic by Naseby, Black's, and all the down traffic. I could not gauge its accuracy.

201. What do you estimate would be the traffic upon this line?—The quantity of wool sent down from the line of coast affected is about two-fifths of the whole produce in Otago, taking 3,500,000 as the number of sheep in Otago proper—that is, about 1,500,000 sheep, taking the wool of seventy-five sheep to equal a bale of wool, would give 20,000 bales, or about 2,500 tons of wool. From Strath Taieri about 1,000 to 1,500 tons of grain would also be sent by the line. I state that amount because the labour available is limited. The increase of production would be regulated by the labour market.

WEDNESDAY, 5TH SEPTEMBER, 1877.

Sir FRANCIS DILLON BELL being in attendance was examined.

Sir. F D. Bell.

202. *The Chairman.*] Your name is Sir Francis Dillon Bell, and you are a member of the Legislative Council?—Yes. *5th Sept., 1877.*

203. You are invited to attend this Committee meeting, Sir Francis, with a view to being asked some questions respecting the proposed line of railway from Palmerston to the interior by Shag Valley. It was at Mr. McLean's suggestion you were invited to attend, and I presume Mr. McLean will proceed with the examination?—I shall be glad to give the Committee any information in my power.

204. *Hon. Mr. McLean.*] You know that proposed line by way of Stoneburn?—Yes.

205. And away round by Moonlight Flat into Blair Taieri?—Yes.

206. What is your opinion of that line?—My opinion is that it is very impracticable, because there would be deep gullies to cross—either the Waikouaiti River, or the Tipperary Gully—which, in my opinion, would make the gradients impossible for a line to be made within any reasonable cost; but a more serious objection exists—that is, that the quality of land through which such a line would pass, with the exception of a small quantity of good agricultural country at Moonlight Flat near Macrae's, is really inferior, and I doubt whether it would tempt people to settle.

207. Then it is no use asking further on that. Now, taking the line by Shag Valley, the one proposed and partly advertised by the Provincial Government to be made—

Sir Francis Dillon Bell: Do you mean as far as Waihemo?

208. *Hon. Mr. McLean.*] Yes, into the interior. Is that line practicable?—It is practicable and easy, but there is an altitude of 2,000 or 2,100 feet to overcome. The quality of the land that the line would go through for about ten or fifteen miles before it reaches Maniototo Plain is, in my opinion, not very good. The advantage that there would be to the State in making that line, if the gradients were not so inferior, as they must be admitted to be as compared with the Strath Taieri line, is this: That in the first place, for a length of about twelve miles from Palmerston up the valley, the land is in cultivation by well-to-do farmers, to whom it would be a great advantage to be connected with the main line; and for a distance of perhaps six or seven miles above my place, which is some seven miles itself from the termination of the level land in the valley to which I refer, the land is of very fine quality, and,