

1881.

NEW ZEALAND.

THE OTAGO CENTRAL RAILWAY

(REPORT OF COMMISSIONERS ON).

*Laid on the Table by the Hon. Mr. Dick, with leave of the House.*TO THE CHAIRMEN AND COUNCILS OF THE COUNTIES OF VINCENT, MANIOTOTO, AND TAIERI, IN
THE PROVINCIAL DISTRICT OF OTAGO.

GENTLEMEN,—

In accordance with your request that we should examine and report on the area and value of the Crown lands which would be opened by the Otago Central Railway, the capabilities of the land for settlement, and to what extent its value would be enhanced, and population, production, and traffic in the central district of Otago increased, by the construction of the said railway, we have now the honor to report that we occupied eleven days in traversing the district up to the terminus at Lake Wanaka, diverging from the main line at various points to inspect land fit for settlement and partially-settled blocks; that we examined a number of witnesses occupying the said blocks, and others who were in a position to give evidence bearing on the subject, and we respectfully submit the result of our investigation for your information.

2. We have assumed that the route of the line, as laid out by the Government Engineer, is the one best adapted for the public interest. Parliament, after due inquiry, has already sanctioned it, and £115,000 have been expended in partially constructing the most difficult portion, the first twenty miles of the work. We have no hesitation in stating our opinion that the line as laid out follows the course most suitable for the development of the resources of the interior, for the increase of settlement, and for the benefit of the widely-scattered mining population, combined at the same time with greatest economy in the cost of works.

3. A general view of the importance of the line may be realized from the following facts: It would start from the Main Southern Trunk Line, only seven miles south from Dunedin, thus having at one terminus a population of 45,000. The district to be traversed contains at present a number of industrial centres, including the Boroughs of Alexandra, Cromwell, and Naseby, and the Townships of Pembroke, Albertown, Bendigo, Bannockburn, Clyde, Ophir, Drybread, Tinker's, Cambrian, St. Bathans, Hill's Creek, Kyeburn, Hamilton, Hyde, Middlemarch, and Hindon. The population numbers about 10,000, all actively engaged in agricultural, pastoral, and mining pursuits, and the various trades and manufactures necessary for such a population. There are 23 post offices, 10 branch banks, and 25 schools, having 36 teachers and 1,503 scholars. A Resident Magistrate's Court is held at eleven different localities. Three newspapers are published locally, viz., the *Mount Ida Chronicle*, the *Dunstan Times*, and the *Cromwell Argus*. The annual valuation of the Counties of Vincent and Maniototo, including boroughs, is £84,424, although nearly the whole of the land is still part of the waste lands of the Crown.

4. A more detailed survey of the district confirms the impression of its importance conveyed by the foregoing general statement.

5. First, as to its agricultural and pastoral interests. There are 39 pastoral runs, with 1,131,666 sheep, the annual revenue from which may be estimated at £281,458. Mr. John Roberts (of Messrs Murray, Roberts, and Co.) Chairman of the Taieri County Council, in his evidence before a Parliamentary Committee, estimated the return of wool to be 20,000 bales, or about 2,500 tons. The extent of agricultural land is not less than 550,000 acres. Of this extent only about one-sixth has been alienated from the Crown, leaving about 450,000 acres of land adapted for agricultural settlement as yet unsold. There are two millions of acres of pastoral land, capable of carrying a much larger stock of sheep than at present. As the leases of the large runs fall in, and the lands are subdivided into smaller areas, so as to be occupied separately or by the owners of adjoining agricultural farms, and worked together with the improved low lands, it is calculated that the carrying capacity of the country will be largely increased, and a yearly revenue from flocks will accrue of the value of half a million sterling and a tonnage for export of 5,000 tons, exclusive of fat stock. The various settlers examined spoke without exception of the remarkable fertility of the soil, and concurred in stating that from 30 to 50 bushels per acre of good wheat have been obtained, and from 35 to 70 bushels of oats. Turnips and other root