

665. Which three?—The Marton-Te Awamutu, the Te Awamutu-Stratford, and the Te Awamutu-Mokau lines; in other words, the central and the two western lines.

666. Have you traversed the whole of the Marton line?—Yes; from end to end.

667. Will you kindly tell the Committee what your opinion is as to the fitness or otherwise of the land along that line for occupation and settlement?—Well, perhaps it would be as well if I were to read extracts from my report as to the land.

668. That is not a published report?—No.

669. You can put in the report as a whole if you like?—No; but I am quite prepared to read extracts from it, though I have no objection whatever to supply the Committee with the whole of the report, excepting the concluding remarks, which are of a private nature. It is as follows:—“North Island Main Trunk Railway.—For this railway from Wellington to Auckland three routes have been suggested, as follows: No. 1. The eastern route, running by way of the Wellington-Napier Railway as far as Hastings, and thence *via* the Ripia Valley, Lake Taupo, and Te Awamutu to Auckland; distance by this route, 466 miles. No. 2. The central route, *via* the Manawatu and the Foxton-New Plymouth Railway to Marton, and thence *via* the Rangitikei and Hautapu Rivers to Waimarino, Taumaranui, Te Kuiti, Te Awamutu, and Auckland; length, 428 miles. An alternative line to the southern part of this route, between Feilding and Hautapu, is now being explored. No 3. The western route, by way of the Manawatu and Foxton-New Plymouth Railways to Stratford, and thence *via* Tangarakau and Ohura Rivers to Te Awamutu and Auckland; length, 470 miles. There is also an alternative proposal in this case, namely, to follow the existing railway from Stratford to Waitara, and thence to run *via* the White Cliffs, the Mokau River, and the Awakino Valley and Upper Mokau Valley to Te Awamutu and Auckland; distance, 467 miles. The eastern route I did not consider it necessary to examine, as the character of the country traversed by it is so poor in quality as to place it out of consideration; but the central route I have fully explored; and I have also traversed the western route to a sufficient extent to enable me to form an opinion of the general character of the country through which it would probably pass. I will refer first to the central route. Upon my arrival at Marton I was met by Mr. Rochfort, the Engineer in Charge of the central-route survey, and received from him all necessary information for my guidance. I started the following morning, accompanied by Mr. Rochfort, and travelled along Murray's track through the bush as far as Pokiore, where we camped in order to spend the following day in viewing the country. Up to about twenty miles from Marton the line runs almost parallel with Murray's track, and then strikes off in the direction of the Rangitikei River. A short distance from Marton the bush is entered, and extends to the valley of the Rangitikei. The land is of good quality and well adapted for grazing and pastoral purposes, some of the flats and table-lands being exceedingly rich in quality. From the Rangitikei the line passes on to the Hautapu Valley, and travels up that valley until the open country is reached. The land in the Hautapu Valley is exceedingly rich, and is admirably adapted for occupation by small settlers, varying, as it does, from broken to undulating and flat land. The line travels through sixty miles of bush between Marton and the open country, and would render available a very large quantity of valuable totara, rimu, kahikatea, and other timbers. As soon as the open country is reached a very large extent of most valuable land is tapped, suitable for both agricultural and pastoral purposes, the whole of the Turangarere and inland Patea country being opened up by this line.” I may here stop to explain to the Committee that, although the line does not pass through this land that I refer to, yet it will open it up, because it will pass very close to it. The line, in fact, runs through just a small portion of it. The land is all open and of excellent quality. It is owned by Natives. A large leasehold run there is occupied by the Birches. This is an important point in considering this line, because a very large quantity of country would thus be opened up.

670. *Mr. Larnach.* Have you any idea of the extent of country?—Several hundreds of thousands of acres. “From Turangarere [continuing to read report] to the old village of Raketapama the line passes through good open country, and then enters the Murimotu Plains, where the land is exceedingly poor, consisting of pumice and pumice sand. The line continues to travel through poor country until it reaches the south-western side of Ruapehu, when the land again improves in quality, but is covered with mixed bush. The whole of the land lying eastwards of the line up to within about eight miles of Lake Taupo, on both sides of Ruapehu and Tongariro, is exceedingly poor, and is covered with an inferior tussock grass, the slopes of the hills being the only places where even decent feed for sheep can be found. The land on the south-western side of Ruapehu, which slopes down towards the railway, is of poor quality, and is partly covered with a dense forest of birch. From the Ohekune clearing, which is about 105 miles from Marton, the line takes a turn, and runs for fifty miles almost in a straight line to the Wanganui River, passing over good table-lands and undulating and flat lands, on which there is a large quantity of useful marketable timber. From this point the line runs along the banks of the Wanganui, until it reaches the settlement of Taumaranui. The land along this portion of the line, although on the banks of the river, is not very good, owing to the quantity of pumice that is mixed with the soil. It is from this point that the Tuhua country would be opened up. The whole of the Tuhua country is covered with dense bush, but the soil is of good quality, although some of the land is rugged and broken. A large quantity of magnificent totara is to be found there, and several coal seams are in close proximity to the railway. It is also stated that gold is to be found all through the Tuhua Ranges. There is also a large block of good open land two miles to the southward of Taumaranui, called Makokomiko. From Taumaranui the line passes through a narrow valley to Waimiha. The land in this valley, along the banks of the stream, is a fair quality, and the fern ranges on both sides of the valley and the surrounding bush both contain fair average grass land, although it is exceedingly rough and broken. On the banks of the Ongarehu Stream, about eight miles south of Waimiha, Mr. Mountford's line from Ohura strikes Mr. Rochfort's line. The whole of the land in the vicinity of Waimiha is of very poor quality; but, as soon as the hill above