

1552. I think mainly the points which I have mentioned, namely, as to the country that would be opened up by the respective routes, and its fitness or otherwise for settlement. I understand that you have travelled through a great part of that country. You could therefore give us an idea as to what proportion, if any, is fit for agricultural or pastoral purposes, and so on?—I know the country all the way to Murimotu on the central line.

1553. From which end?—From Alexandra down to Murimotu. In coming down from there I have always turned off to the Wanganui River, and therefore cannot speak as to the southern portion of the central line. A great deal of the northern portion is very good country, but the Stratford line also traverses that country. Thence this latter line comes into the Mokau country, regarding which there is a report from Dr. Hector, whom I sent there to explore. I believe the line traversed by the Stratford route in that part of the country is most valuable, on account of the minerals. It is some of the richest mineral country in New Zealand. Then, I know part of the coast-line between Mokau and Taranaki—the Mokau line. The country there is good in places, and in other places it is not so good.

1554. Do you know the country from Mokau to Stratford?—I have travelled over it in places, but I do not know it well. There is a great deal of good country in places; in fact, part of it is very good indeed.

1555. Do you know absolutely the route as laid down on the map?—I am not sure that I have been on that. I have been on it, of course, in different places, but there was no good track there at the time. I do not know the Stratford line at all from the Mokau River.

1556. The question has been put to several witnesses who have had considerable experience in such matters—and you can answer it or not, as you like—as to which of these routes would, in the event of any future Maori difficulty, be of most service to the country. Would you like to give your opinion on that subject?—I have no hesitation in saying that, under all circumstances, the line from Stratford would, in my opinion, be the most serviceable. I thought the best line was to Waitara, and of course that was the line taken for the railroad when I was Native Minister. I believe that if that line were made Native disturbances could not take place; and I believe it would affect the Natives very largely. I think, if an arrangement were made by which the railroad would be left the property of the Natives, and managed by them on condition that sufficient land was given by them to pay the cost of constructing it, you would then have funds available from the million to be raised to pay for that line to construct lines from Gisborne and Napier, running into the common line leading to the north, and into the line from Napier to Wellington. I believe you would have funds to do that, so as to have two lines completed—one from Auckland to New Plymouth, and the other to a line which would connect with the main-trunk line from Tauranga, Gisborne, Napier, and Wellington. No arrangement of that kind could, I believe, be made until Tawhiao returns from England. A leading chief came to me the other day and asked me to try to get the matter delayed until Tawhiao returns. I think the Natives would give certain portions of the land to have a railway there, with power for the Government to purchase it at any time they pleased. When I chose the line by way of Taranaki, during my administration, I did so with the view of uniting the two great populations of Auckland and of the whole of the New Plymouth District. The result of adopting the Stratford line will be to bring Auckland into communication with that district. I believe that these two populations being united will result in benefit to both of them, and that the land opened up will be immediately occupied. In my mind, to take the central route would be to delay for years the advantages which would be instantly gained by adopting the Stratford line. A great trade would at once spring up between the Auckland and New Plymouth Districts. The greater part of the settlements from Waitara to Urenui are now progressing rapidly. The whole of the remaining part of that line between Alexandra and Mokau is the only piece which is uninhabited by Europeans, and would be available for immediate settlement. Thus, the whole line from Auckland to New Plymouth would shortly after its completion traverse an inhabited country, generally of a fertile character, and must soon prove remunerative.

1557. *Mr. Larnach.*] How long ago is it since you were in that country?—I have been there many times; but I think the last time I was there must have been about 1865. I first of all traversed it carefully about 1847 or 1848, looking for a road from Auckland to New Plymouth.

1558. You say that you travelled down southward from Te Awamutu as far as Murimotu, and then branched off to the Wanganui?—Yes.

1559. Do you remember what the country is like between there and the Wanganui?—It is an excessively broken, difficult country.

1560. But of what quality?—It is a forest land, with occasional rich, open plains, but the plains are of no great extent. It is a country capable of producing olives, oranges, and vines. It is more like the Azores than any other country, both in regard to climate and general appearance; and, for the purpose of growing oranges, olives, vines, and so on, I think it will, in those respects be one of the finest countries in the world—that is, the country between Murimotu and Wanganui. The heat is in summer great from radiation from the cliffs, and the temperature is very high; but moisture is abundant, irrigation practicable in many places, and the soil on the plains and many level places is of great fertility.

1561. Are there any good tracts of forest land between Wanganui, northward, and Murimotu?—It is generally forest land, with deep ravines, open plains, and glades. There some large forests of totara occur.

1562. Any maize?—I forget the timber. The timber which particularly struck me was the totara. It is a magnificent forest country, and I believe it will be one of the richest countries in the world for every sort of produce of the kind I have named. I have always believed it will ultimately yield a large export, and that Wanganui will be a very important town.

1563. Supposing the central line were made, would it be as useful in connection with any possible Native difficulty as any other proposed line?—I think the line by Stratford would be more useful: I do not believe a Native difficulty could occur after that was constructed. I feel tolerably certain