

in-Chief to state that the use of this timber was insisted upon against his strong protest, and it is now found that it would have been much better to have adopted his recommendation and used more lasting timber: these bridges ought not to have required much repairs for the next ten years instead of having to be rebuilt at this early stage in the life of the railway.

In connection with the railways generally, I doubt if many honourable members realize the effect produced on their revenue by the works of the Harbour Boards of Otago, Oamaru, and Timaru. As these works progress, so the railway revenue suffers, and to such an extent have the works of the Otago Harbour Board—by which most classes of vessels can now get up the harbour to Dunedin—affected the revenue, that it is estimated that the railway suffers this year a loss of fully £8,000; and, from the information in the possession of the Government, it is not likely that by the end of this year there will be any goods traffic from Port Chalmers except that brought there by the large direct steamships. And I am advised by those interested that, if the Government did reduce the rates by one-half those now prevailing, the bulk of the goods would still go direct to Dunedin. Such a reduction would, therefore, only have the effect of throwing away a great deal of the revenue left to the railway which otherwise must remain, at all events for some considerable time to come.

No doubt the residents in the parts of the colony in which these great works have been carried out are reaping great benefit from them, but it must be borne in mind that the railways constructed by the Government are suffering in proportion as the harbour works succeed.

Since supplying my honourable colleague the Colonial Treasurer with the estimate of the revenue and expenditure on the railways for the current year, the severe floods we have had will affect the expenditure in the way of repairs; and, should any considerable number of our population be attracted to the newly-discovered goldfields in Western Australia, the traffic may be sensibly reduced. It is very certain we are now losing the carriage of a large amount of farm-produce, which has been destroyed by the exceptionally-heavy autumn rains; but, on the other hand, we have calculated on a much larger acreage of grain being put in this year than last, and consequently expect a larger revenue therefrom. We have also calculated upon considerable additions to our receipts from the extensions of the railways, which we hope to have under construction in a few weeks. It is too early in the year to make any safe calculation, and there is no reason to suppose there will be any serious falling-off in the revenue: should there be, there will certainly be a reduction in the expenditure.

It has been the custom for some years to publish the very elaborate statistical information with the annual Public Works Statement in connection with opened railways, and the same course will be adopted on the present occasion; but it is a matter for serious consideration whether it is worth while to publish these tables.

Much discussion has taken place on the subject of the system of charges now in force, and a Committee of this House is now taking evidence on a proposal for a radical change. I shall not therefore venture an opinion on the particular proposal which that Committee has under consideration, but remind the House that the system we now have in use is similar to that adopted in the adjoining colonies, as also in the railways in other countries; and before making any change, the probability of its success should be clearly demonstrated. The want that is felt is more in the direction of some authority to whom any member of the public can make their grievances known, and feel that they get fair consideration.

I have hesitated to reintroduce the Bill I laid before the House last year, as I feel certain that it would not meet with general support; and, although two other Bills have been sketched out to meet the case, I cannot see any practical good that would come from them so long as this Parliament is not prepared to part with a great deal more of its control than it has done hitherto.

The exigencies of the country are so diversified that to work our railways to the best advantage some parts of the country require very different rates to those in other parts; but so jealous are those who use our railways in the several provincial districts of any changes made in the charges with a view of securing