

28. But I wish first to ask you, is there any necessity for Government interfering at all?—Yes; it is imperative.

29. Is there any other way of making this timber valuable and opening these interesting valleys to a large number of people?—No other way.

30. That precludes any other line?—There is no other way of bringing the timber to the seaboard with profit.

31. *The Chairman.*] Is there any other way of taking the timber from other parts of the reserve?—No, the best sites in the valley were secured for this tramway when the large companies thought they were about to purchase the forest lands as they went on with the business.

32. Do you not think it would put your case better if you were to recommend the Government to open up this valley independently of any tramway at all?—I do not think so; I do not think there is any capitalist who would attempt to put another line into that valley, especially with only the right to cut over 600 acres or 800 acres.

33. *Mr. Wason.*] What I suggested was whether the Government could possibly put down a tramway line cheaper than buying this tramway?—That would be a matter for the Government to decide. It would be a matter of detail: in my opinion it would be impossible to put down any line at such a cost as to compete with the one that is there now and can be purchased.

34. How long has the tramway been running?—I think for about ten years.

35. *Mr. J. W. Thomson.*] Is it a good substantial work?—Yes.

36. Which the Minister for Railways would approve?—Yes.

37. Is it worked with an engine or horse-power?—There is an engine, trucks, and iron rails. There is a report in the Public Works Department which gives every information, and can be had for the asking. It is a report from the engineer dealing with the whole of this phase of the tramway question, and recommending the Government to purchase it.

38. *Hon. Mr. Rolleston.*] It comes to this: Either the Government must buy this tramway, or the whole opening of this block will be commanded practically by the tramway company?—Yes. It amounts nearly to that. I might say for the information of the Committee that this matter of purchase and survey was under negotiation three years ago, and Mr. Brownlee then made three offers through the Land Board. He said that having heard that Government were likely to start co-operative tramways and sawmills, he would be willing to part with his interest in the sawmill and tramway. The second offer was that he would sell his tramway so that it might not be in the hands of a monopoly, but let others go into the bush and work against them. The third offer was that he would be willing to carry on the tramway himself if the Government would make some reasonable concession for the heavy expense in constructing it.

39. What is the liability to fire in this bush?—Very little. In exceptionally dry hot weather some of it might catch fire.

40. *The Chairman.*] Would it not be possible for the Government to come to some arrangement with the owners by which haulage rates could be paid by other mills to carry the timber over, after extending the line through, the same as is done with the Manawatu line without purchasing; would it not be possible to make some arrangement of that kind?—Not being the owner I could not tell you. They might make an arrangement with Mr. Brownlee. I cannot answer your question. But you have not the same confidence in working over a private line you have over a line which the Government are working. There are many things that affect the question. Vessels come in for timber, and they have a certain number of "lay" days; there might be an objection by other sawmillers to Mr. Brownlee, thinking his timber was coming into port or getting out sooner than theirs.

41. *Hon. Mr. Rolleston.*] But there would be other subsidiary tramways before some of this block would be accessible?—It all depends upon the distance you put the line into the forest.

42. *Mr. Wason.*] How do you propose to extend it; it says in the petition "five miles"?—Towards the Opouri Valley. It is about eight miles from the junction of the Ronga River with the Rai to the head of the Ronga Valley. There are two distinct valleys.

43. *Mr. Flatman.*] Do I understand that the Nelson petition asks for 18,600 out of the 40,000 acres?—Yes.

44. They do not ask for a reservation of the whole 40,000 acres?—No.

45. *The Chairman.*] That would include the higher country?—What they ask for is the watershed of these two valleys, containing the best of our timber and level land.

46. *Mr. Wason.*] He does not make it clear how much it will cost for this five miles. You say you have the Engineer's reports on the tramways?—Yes.

47. What would it cost, roughly, to make these five miles?—I should say about £7,000.

48. What do you say as to the question of "tithe"; how much do you say it ought to be?—It is 6d. per hundred feet superficial; it used to be only 3d. Considering the small area of forest land in the colony, I think it is less than it should be. I have repeatedly recommended that the tithe should be increased. Everybody who knows anything of timber lands knows that whether it is 3d. or 6d. makes very little difference to the man who is building; but it will make all the difference to the colony if the tithe was raised, as that would make private owners conserve their timber. We have had a number of inquiries made with reference to tithe, and what the proper amount should be. I say it should be universal over all the Crown lands throughout the colony, and not less than 1s. per hundred superficial feet. That would be the best step to take.

49. *Mr. Flatman.*] That would depend on what it is worth?—The Timber Conference held here last year recommended that there should be an increased tithe; then concessions would be made to those who had to lay tramways for some distance to a port or to reach a Government line. There should be a graduated charge made in those cases.

50. *Hon. Mr. Rolleston.*] How much of the timber land is unexhausted which belongs to the owner of the existing tramway?—I could not say; not a great deal.

51. Then the tramway would in the course of time be useless?—No, not useless; for it would