

17. There is still the whole of the Nelson line, except that between Brunner and Reefton, to complete, and also a large portion of the East and West Coast railway, and you assume it cannot be completed for four years?—Yes.

18. So there is ten years' delay?—Ten years wasted.

19. Will you tell the Committee whether the colony has suffered damage, loss, and injury by the non-completion of this railway and by the postponement I have stated?—I shall be very happy to express, not only my own opinion, but the opinion of every business man in Canterbury. We hold that if the line had been completed we should have had a much larger population, not only in Canterbury, but in some of the districts on the West Coast. We recognise the mere developing of the traffic from one coast to the other being delayed is not necessarily a direct loss to the colony as a whole, but the increase of production is a direct gain to the colony; and we feel, had the lands which were locked up by this matter been open, a very considerable amount of settlement would have taken place, and if free communication was possible between the West Coast and Canterbury we should have a much larger population. Instead of that the population of Westland has decreased owing to its isolation, but if people there could obtain their goods five or six days quicker than they do now, and if they could get them cheaper, the strain to live would be very much reduced on the West Coast; and if the people of Canterbury could visit the West Coast more quickly and more cheaply, as they would be able to do if the railway were completed, it would enable them to open up the mining industries of the West Coast. The West Coast has produced something like twenty-five millions' worth of gold in the last 40 years, and we feel certain that if the people of Canterbury could visit that district more quickly the checks to the mining industry would disappear, and the industry would go ahead very much faster than it is possible for it to do now. The possibilities are beyond conception, and if we were able to invest freely in their dredges there would be an increase of 10 per cent. in the output of gold. That would be a great advantage to the colony, that and other things in connection with the railway. Mention has been made of the tourist traffic, but that is a minor thing. I do not know whether the fact of the Midland Railway being open would induce a very much larger number of people to come to New Zealand, but I know that people visiting the country like to devote as much time as they can to that object; and if this were added to the tourist route it would enable people coming from Australia to reach Christchurch in seven or even, perhaps, twelve hours less than it takes them now. If we take £2 a day as about an average of what they would spend, it must, as far as New Zealand is concerned, mean a considerable amount of extra money expended in the colony. Then there is the question of people leaving the country, and that is a very important point to consider in connection with this railway. We have had unfortunately in Canterbury a large number of unemployed—though happily that day has gone by. We often see by the returns that a great many people leave New Zealand. We have an increase of population because of the birth-rate, but there are many departures from the colony. That arises from the want of employment, and if we had this railway it is fair to assume that no man could claim the right to demand help on account of being unemployed. There is a large field for work on the West Coast, and if this railway was constructed, and facilities for communication with that district given, there would be no occasion for people to leave the country for want of employment. I think if the wants of pastoral and agricultural pursuits were met it would mean a considerable increase in the wealth of the colony; and, if it prevented young people leaving because they cannot get employment for themselves profitably in the colony, it would be a great benefit to the people of the country generally if the Government would complete the construction of the railway.

20. *Mr. Bell.*] I am afraid this Committee will not recommend the Government to continue the construction of the line. I want you to confine yourself, as far as possible, to the points in which we have suffered by the non-completion of the railway rather than an advocacy of the railway. Is it not a fact that settlement has been barred by this blue reservation of six million acres of land?—I am aware it is so.

21. Are you aware that men from the Canterbury side desired to settle there, and were prevented by this reservation?—I know a great many who were desirous of settling in that part of the country, and were prevented doing so because they could not get the land, and they left the colony because they could not get it.

22. And many more came to the North Island?—I do not know how many.

23. You have told us, in the figures of the Chamber of Commerce, that there would be a great timber and coal trade if this line had been completed?—Yes.

24. You people in Canterbury, who formed the league, and the people of Nelson also believed that there was going to be a great advantage to the colony by the construction of this railway: that there would be a great development of trade and settlement on the coast, an increase of population there, and a large timber and coal trade?—Yes.

25. And that there should be an expenditure of three millions of money on this work?—Yes.

26. At what do you estimate the loss caused by the delay of so many years?—It is very difficult to say, and I do not like to say anything which cannot be supported by figures. I have pointed out that, as far as gold is concerned, there has been a loss which I should be under-estimating if I put it at less than 10 per cent., and on the annual production that would mean £50,000 a year. When one tries to estimate the advantage to the colony as a whole by the increase of population, one cannot be certain as to the increase that would take place. Then there is the production from the land taken up, and it would be a bold man who would venture to estimate that.

27. What I am pointing at is this: that you gentlemen advocated, and rightly advocated, that the expenditure of three millions in the colony would bring with it all these advantages. Is, then, the locking-up of these lands for so many years a trifling sum, and, if not, at what do you estimate it?—I do not know in what direction, as a business-man, I could reply to you; but I think it is one of the greatest blows that has ever been inflicted on the colony. It is a most important thing that