

15. And the facilities for travelling?—Yes; they are very much in the same condition, except in regard to the portion of the line which has been constructed to Belgrove, and also to Reefton.

16. But that is not communication between coast and coast?—No.

17. Could you give the Committee your opinion as to the minimum amount above which it is clear to your mind the colony has suffered through the non-construction of the railway?—I do not think any one man could estimate the amount of injury the colony has suffered. There is no actual basis on which to work in many respects. I am convinced of this: that, in addition to settlement, there would have been a large coal trade opened. There is coal within fifty miles of Nelson, but there is no railway to enable it to be worked. Had that land been open I am convinced that, even without the railway, there would have been dairying factories put up, and even freezing-works established.

18. You think that the loss to the colony is a matter that cannot be computed, but do you think that it certainly exceeds a sum of, say, £100?—Oh, yes; certainly more than that.

19. Can you give a limit of the extent to which the colony has suffered injury?—I can put it in this way: that the Railway League had evidence before it that there was 775,000 acres of land fit for settlement between Belgrove and Brunner. The value of that without the railway was £430,000. It was computed that 50,000 acres of the land in the railway reserve would be worth £10 an acre. I have run out a very rough estimate of the loss upon that would be 3 per cent. on £840,000, or £137,000 compound interest in five years. You may say that that land is still there for settlement, but in the meantime the compound interest has been lost. I have also considered that there should have been some 2,400 people settled on that land, and there would have been a gain to the State if these lands had been settled. The State would have had the advantage of the Customs duties and other things from that land. I have also considered that there should be at the lowest estimate a thousand people obtaining gold. I believe the average obtained per miner per annum is £66. If you put that at £60 it comes to £100,000 in five years. The reason why I say five years is this: that I think if the company had worked properly and expeditiously, and had constructed the railway within the contract time, and had sold their land, they would have got an increased value for the land, and the railway should have been completed five years ago.

20. Then there is the question of the convenience to people in Canterbury and Westland?—Yes.

21. Quite apart from the locking-up of the land, is that, in your opinion, a matter that can be estimated by a trifling sum?—I know that at the present time if there are a few days' rain it is impossible for people in the Tadmor Valley to cross the river. They may be detained for three days, and then, if they get across, they may be detained in the town for another three days before they can get back home again.

22. Have you heard me read the figures showing the difference that the Manawatu Railway has made in the commerce and trade in the North Island?—Yes.

23. Do you or do you not believe that the construction of the Midland Railway would have produced something of the same result in Nelson and Westland?—If we had not been convinced of that we should not have urged that the work should be undertaken.

24. *Dr. Findlay.*] Do you think it is fair to make a comparison between the Wellington District and that of Nelson? It is put to you that, by the construction of the Manawatu Railway, the commerce and trade of the Wellington District has been greatly increased. I put to you this aspect of the question: Wellington is the chief distributing port of the colony, and it has a fine harbour, and you cannot argue that the same causes which have led to the increase of trade and commerce in Wellington will apply to Nelson?—In some respects I think the advantages from the construction of a railway would be greater in Nelson.

25. How can you distinguish between the benefits conferred on Wellington by the construction of the Manawatu Railway from those which it has from its being the distributing centre of the colony, and from its fine harbour?—But it had the harbour before the railway was constructed.

26. Just so; but it is the distributing centre for the rest of the colony, and the benefits from that would not be due to the Manawatu Railway?—No.

27. Nelson is not a distributing centre?—It is for the West Coast, and to a certain extent for Wanganui.

28. Every town is to a certain extent a distributing centre, but Wellington is the great distributing centre of the colony, and its prosperity is great in consequence?—Mr. Bell mentioned the Wellington District, and you cannot say that Palmerston and these other places gained because Wellington is the distributing centre.

29. But we were to take the increase in the population of Wellington, and in the value of land in the Wellington District, and the inference was that that was all due to the construction of the Manawatu Railway?—I may say that, so far as our information goes, there is a very great prospect that had this Midland Railway been completed coal would have been exported from Nelson, and that would have been a great advantage.

30. You say that the league expected that a considerable area of the 775,000 acres of land would be worth £10 an acre?—Yes; 50,000 acres.

31. Unimproved?—Yes.

32. What class of country is it?—Bush land—mostly bush.

33. Unimproved as it stood?—Yes.

34. What do you allow for clearing it?—That would be done by the sawmillers. The calculation was that it would have readily fetched £10 an acre for sawmilling purposes.

35. How long would it take sawmillers to clear it?—That is a question I cannot answer.

36. Would it not take some years to bring it into profitable occupation?—No doubt; but at the same time there are many sawmill areas wholly timber land, and the sawmillers do not only look to the immediate future, but to some distance in the future.