

1167. The whole length of about eighteen miles?—Yes.

1168. Was that necessary?—Oh, absolutely.

1169. Is there more ballast still required?—Yes, a very large quantity.

1170. You had some heavy protective works on the Big Grey?—Yes.

1171. And more at the Little Grey?—Yes, larger still.

1172. Were these necessary?—Absolutely necessary. We had suffered from an inundation of a very serious nature in March, 1897, which did very large damage, and cut away large portions of the railway. The whole bed of the Little Grey River threatened to leave its course and take down between the railway and the road, which meant the absolute destruction of the line; and not only that, but doing away with the utility of a large and expensive bridge across the Little Grey which had been built for the Midland Railway Company.

1173. These protective works which you put there would not be an annually recurrent expenditure?—No; they give every evidence of being absolutely permanent, and they have effected the purpose for which they were erected.

1174. I wish to ask you to state your opinion as to the prospective increase of traffic on this railway—the prospective increase on the present earnings, say, within the next ten years throughout the whole section?—I think it would be very fair to consider that there is a large increase in front of the sections, more especially of the Jackson's Section, because, so far as the connection between here and Christchurch is concerned, that is so far in the future that it would hardly enter into the calculations. I presume you refer to the whole of the earning-power only of the Jackson's Section as contained between Jackson's and Stillwater, and the returns show that a large increase has taken place in the export of timber over that section, and there is every evidence of it continuing for the next ten years. I do not go beyond that. There are several new mills being erected, and it is fair to presume that they will at least maintain the present rate of export, in face of what the old mills are losing by being cut out. But beyond that I cannot say anything definite. So far as the Reefton Section is concerned, unless the coal-measures at Blackball were very largely developed, and that aerial tramway done away with, and some other means of increasing their daily output, which is now limited, is substituted, I do not see how you are going to look for any greater output from that part. The earnings of the Reefton Section between Greymouth and Reefton, except for passenger traffic, are very small.

1175. Should you not say beyond Ngahere instead of Totara Flat?—I say that because there is a large number of dredges being built in and about the district, and the probabilities are that many of them will create a considerable amount of traffic, as they will burn coal and create passenger traffic. But Totara Flat serves all that, and beyond that I can see little or nothing. I think, considering that the questions you are asking me are somewhat out of my district—I do not pretend to be a professional traffic expert or estimator—I can only give you the common-sense views that struck me. I presume they are about as valuable as the average.

1176. *Dr. Findlay.*] As valuable as the average person, I take it, who has your knowledge and experience of the district?—Just so.

1177. How long have you been here?—Four years, with a lucid interval of seven months when I was absent.

1178. You do not, I take it, know or claim to know anything of the country lying beyond Reefton?—Absolutely nothing.

1179. Nor do you know, I understand, what prospect lies before these coal-measures which have been referred to by witnesses from Reefton?—I know nothing but hearsay.

1180. Nor can you speak of the possibilities of connecting the forests beyond Reefton profitably with the terminus of the Reefton line?—You see, I was limited by the questions put to me. If the question of branch feeders had been introduced it would have vastly altered my replies.

1181. You will have to contemplate an extension of the line beyond its present terminus near to Reefton or the original terminus at Jackson's. It has been suggested by witnesses that extensive coalfields beyond Reefton and large forest areas there may induce private enterprise to connect these resources by a light line of railway privately constructed with the terminus at Reefton, and I put it to you therefore: If private enterprise constructed such a light line, bringing in the coal-measures and the forests and gold country, can you or can you not say what influence that would have on the traffic between Reefton and Greymouth?—It would have a very large influence if the coal and timber are there in payable quantities.

1182. And of their existence you do not speak?—I know nothing; I know the coal is there, and that it is good and excellent for household purposes only.

1183. Now, we had a gentleman named Pavitt, who has had very many years' experience, and he gave us a large number of figures in regard to the future possibilities of the timber trade, and he gave us an estimate of the different timber areas: do you know anything of them up the Reefton line or up the Jackson's line?—I know very little beyond the railway-fences.

1184. It is really unfair to ask you to speculate on the prospective value?—I do not speculate on anything I do not know.

1185. You do not ask the Commission to accept from you any guidance as to the possible increase of traffic over this line?—I do not consider my opinion valuable on the subject at all.

1186. With regard to the cost of maintenance on the Midland Railway sections, Mr. Bell led you to say that a large expenditure had been made on protective works at the Big Grey and Little Grey Rivers?—Yes.

1187. Can you give me an idea of the amount of money spent on these protective works?—Somewhere between £4,000 and £5,000.

1188. Now, the flood in 1897 was the heaviest, I am told, ever known in this district?—It is the heaviest I ever knew. It certainly was the heaviest ever known since the Midland Railway was built.