

40. Then, each settler runs his own fruit down as far as possible?—As far as possible. They have a sort of system of mutual co-operation. There is now talk of their forming a jam-factory there also, to try and evade the loss of fruit.

41. Is the cultivation of fruit extending?—Oh, yes; they have planted an additional number of trees during the last year or so.

42. Then, the traffic is likely to be permanent?—Oh, yes, much increased as far as the fruit is concerned.

43. *Mr. J. W. Thomson.*] Have you any idea how much money is spent in keeping the road in repair—I believe it has been in a bad state for some years past?—No; I have not prepared any statistics showing that at the present time. I was up the road the other day. I should think between thirty or forty men are employed on the road—on the first sixteen miles of the road.

44. *The Chairman.*] How many?—Between thirty and forty men. The road was really so bad that they were working in quarries, and carting the stone and pitching it into the biggest holes they could find in order to allow the traffic to get through.

45. *Mr. J. W. Thomson.*] I understand the road has been fairly bad since the dredging commenced?—It has been bad, but it is always bad every winter.

46. Owing chiefly to no good metal being on the line?—That is one of the drawbacks no doubt. Every year there are so many wet months that traffic is nearly impossible.

47. You believe there would be a great trade if there were communication by railway between these two places?—I believe there would.

Mr. F. N. BYRNE examined.

48. *The Chairman.*] What is your name?—F. N. Byrne.

49. Where do you live?—At Lawrence.

50. What is your occupation?—I am a journalist.

51. You can give us what you know on the subject-matter of the petition before the Committee?—Well, the previous witness has said so much about it that he has left me very little to say. There was one point, however, and it is a very material point—that is, as regards the traffic. The traffic was abnormal during the time the dredges were being built, and that has largely disappeared, of course; but the traffic is as large now as then, but it does not arise from the same cause. At that time the dredging material all came from Dunedin, and now the traffic comes from Coal Creek. There are thirty dredges on the river, and they have to be supplied with steam-coal.

52. Where is Coal Creek, on the Forty Mile Road?—It is two miles on the other side of Roxburgh, so that there is the same heavy traffic continuing, and it is impossible to say how long it will last. Nobody dares say that the Molyneux will ever be exhausted of its gold. People have been prophesying for many years about it. The general belief among experts and people who have studied the question is that, after the present appliances and the present machinery is dispensed with, there will be new appliances and new machinery brought to bear on the river, and it is a well-known fact that they are not now getting anything like a fair quantity of gold at all, so that the gold will always stand; and, besides, the coal from Coal Creek can be brought down into Lawrence and sold for about 12s. a ton. Well, coal is a very big item to working-miners about the Lawrence district. With the railway this could be brought down and sold for 12s. a ton. As regards the prospective possibilities of the district, of course they are very large, because there is splendid land right down to Lawrence, and it is all capable of being converted into fruit-growing areas right away down to Beaumont, which is twelve miles from Lawrence.

53. Where is the market?—Oh, as far as Christchurch and Dunedin. If they had good regular facilities for conveying the fruit to the market I believe they could supply the whole of the markets of the South Island. It is a splendid paying industry, but, as I say, the enterprise of the people is cramped and hindered by the fact that they cannot rely on getting the fruit to market, and the loss in consequence is very heavy. The cows and cattle are turned into the orchards. They have formed a jam-factory in the district for the purpose of converting the fruit into jam, and so that the district might have the benefit of it, though it would be better and safer for them to get the fruit to Dunedin some way and have it manufactured into jam there. It would be better to do that than to attempt to bring the different compounds up from Dunedin, as the cost would be too heavy on them. In bringing the fruit to market the great difficulty fruit-growers meet with is that they cannot send it down in large consignments. They have to send it down in light spring vans.

54. Do not they put it up in cases?—Yes; but they could not put it in wagons. It would get bumped into pieces. Those wagons sometimes get bogged and cannot get out for twenty-four hours. That arrangement would not do in our district. The fruit-growers in the district at the present time are the actual sufferers, and they would be the large beneficiaries by the railway; and then there are the prospective benefits that would accrue to the wool season, and the stimulus which would be given to the dredging. The fruit industry is a national industry. Then you have large quarries and mountains of coal. That coal might and possibly would go far beyond the limits of Tuapeka in the course of time, when its qualities were ascertained and proved. The whole land right down to the Beaumont is splendid fruit-growing country. I rely upon the great benefit the colony would derive from this railway by the vast expansion of the fruit industry. That is a thing the colony is very badly in need of—namely, fruit at a cheap price.

55. It is lying rotting all over the country?—It is rotting all over the country, but it is almost at a prohibitive price. Those are the two permanent industries—the wool and the fruit. The latter is capable of enormous expansion. Then there is the dredging and mining industry; these, in my opinion, will be there for all time, practically speaking. The Molyneux is fabulously rich in gold, and it has never been exploited to any extent. The railway through would be the first thing to attract the prospector and people of means, in order to ascertain the mineral wealth of the district, and give it a trial which it has never really had before.