

(parliamentary paper C.-13, 1921) reference is made to these forest plantations, and a report by Mr. R. W. Holmes, late Engineer-in-Chief and Under-Secretary for Public Works, is quoted as follows: 'There is another point that must not be lost sight of in considering this question, and that is that the Forestry Department has very large plantations in the vicinity of Waiotapu, which is about eighteen miles along the route Rotorua to Taupo. Irrespective of what is done in the way of giving Taupo railway connection, it will be absolutely necessary that a railway be constructed before many years elapse to Waiotapu to deal with the output from the State forests. The land is cheap here, trees seem to do well, and it is only a matter of increasing the plantations until there will be as much timber coming out as the railway can comfortably handle, and this will continue in perpetuity.'"

Commenting upon this the Commissioners add: "It would seem, therefore, that there is urgent necessity, in order to avoid great national waste, for an extension of the Rotorua Government railway to Waiotapu with as little delay as possible; and bearing this in mind, and having in view the probability that the Government will give effect sooner or later to the strong recommendations of the late Engineer-in-Chief and the Director of Forests, your Commissioners venture to express the opinion that the line to connect Taupo with a Government railway system should be an extension of the existing Government railway to Rotorua. We respectfully beg to endorse the opinion that in order to realize the value, both present and prospective, of these plantations means of transit by railway must be provided, and we may add that a railway from Rotorua terminating at a suitable point in the vicinity of the Waiotapu plantations would reasonably serve the present settlement in the Waiotapu Valley and would open up a further large area of land for development. There is also a possibility that the indigenous forests to the west of the Waikato River can be tapped by such a line." Well, now, I submit that that means, "We recommend the construction of the railway, but we cannot say that it will pay 4 per cent.," and that they could not absolutely recommend it because their order of reference was, "Will the railway pay 4 per cent.?" They say it will pay only 1.2 per cent. I do not wish to disguise the fact that this report minimizes the value of the land agriculturally, but the members of the Commission did not inspect a single farm in the area. I want to ask for the attendance of Mr. H. H. Sterling, General Manager of Railways, who was Secretary to this Commission, and who will be able to say whether the Commissioners saw a single farm. I would like to read an extract from the findings of the previous Royal Commission, which did inspect some of the farms, and spoke in no uncertain terms as to the value and possibilities of this country.

166. What were the findings of the previous Royal Commission?—That Commission was really set up to inquire into the question of the Taupo Totara Timber Co.'s tramway and railway. It had nothing to do with the Rotorua-Taupo country, but after viewing it the Commission was so impressed with the possibilities of that country that it recommended the construction of a railway from Rotorua to Taupo. With regard to the agricultural value of the land the Commission said: "Without cheap manures and transit at a moderate cost these lands can never be farmed profitably . . . Clovers and cow-grass grow exceedingly well, and there is ample feed during nine months of the year . . . It undoubtedly constitutes the largest area of undeveloped waste land in the Dominion, and calls loudly for some special action to be taken to bring it into productivity. The experiments already made with pumice soils clearly show that given proper tillage, and with the use of appropriate manures, the land is capable of satisfactory development." After citing some instances of the carrying-capacity of the land, the report proceeds: "With instances like these before us we are forced to the conclusion that the suitability of these pumice lands for farming purposes is beyond question, but the needs of the district will not be fully met until the Government railway is extended to Taupo." This Commission investigated a great number of farms, and was fully convinced that the pumice land would be brought into profitable use.

167. Do you know of any other reports made since 1922?—Yes. The gentleman of whom I have spoken, Mr. Napier, is coming to Wellington, and is anxious to give evidence. He sent me a report on this country by Mr. T. H. Paterson, who was Instructor in Agriculture, but is now away from New Zealand.

168. You know the light lands of the Waikato fairly well?—Yes, I have known the Waikato since 1877.

169. Has it not made remarkable strides since 1922?—Yes; since the institution of top-dressing the improvement in the Waikato has been marvellous. I saw some paddocks last week in which the growth was extraordinary. These paddocks were near Hamilton.

170. Have you any idea of the exports from the Port of Auckland since 1922?—They have increased at an astonishing rate. I cannot give the figures, but I know from the reports of the Department of Agriculture that the export of butter from the single Port of Auckland is rather more than half that from the whole of the Dominion, and probably the largest export of butter from any port in the world.

171. Is that due almost entirely to the knowledge acquired in the use of fertilizers?—That is the main factor. Of course, the improvement in the cows has been a great factor, but the main factor has been the use of fertilizers on the surface, without breaking the sod at all.

172. You consider that the development of this area is to be contrasted with what it was in 1920?—Yes.

173. Great advances have been made?—Yes. There were then only 27,000 acres planted in trees, there are now 130,000 acres of Government forest plantations, and 30,000 of private forest plantation. The advance in the methods of treating the land in recent years has been wonderful. I do not think any one in the district used manure until within the last three or four years, but with the use of manures I have paddocks on my place which will compare favourably with paddocks anywhere, and the most I have used is 3 cwt. to the acre.