

I am disposed to think that much may be done in this direction, and that a fair proportion of the money expended on Public Works may find its way back to the Treasury.

Out of the loan authorized last session, there remained, on 30th June, available for public works, about £2,000,000. If we add to the Public Works Fund from ordinary revenue, during the next five years, say, £3,500,000, the amount just stated as available will be increased to £5,500,000; and there will remain about £3,000,000 to be raised by further loans, in order to meet the estimated cost of the whole of our proposals.

It may, perhaps, be asked, is not £3,500,000 too large a sum to expect to be spared from revenue? Is the revenue likely to be in a position to meet such a demand? In order that honorable members may be enabled to form an opinion as to this, I shall enumerate the different areas of Crown lands, the value of which will be specially affected by the proposed railways, and the sale of which may be said to be contingent upon those lines being constructed.

In the Middle Island, the *Otago Central to Albert Town* will pass almost entirely through Crown land, and open up the most valuable public estate in the colony: it will affect an area of 2,250,000 acres, all in the hands of the Crown.

*Amberley to Brunnerton* will pass through nearly 300,000 acres of freehold, and render available 400,000 acres of Crown land.

*Greymouth to Hokitika* will affect 85,000 acres of forest land belonging to the Crown.

*Canterbury Subsidiary Main Line* will pass chiefly through freehold land, but as it cuts across all the valleys at the base of the hill country, its construction will be of considerable value to the settlement of those valleys, and render more accessible an area of Crown land of 560,000 acres.

*South Ashburton to Ashburton Forks, and Albury Extension*, will enhance the value of 30,000 acres.

*Fortrose to Edendale*.—A preliminary survey of this line has been made, in terms of a resolution of the House last session, and land has been reserved for its construction in accordance with the same resolution. It will promote the profitable occupation of 120,000 acres of land, 40,000 of which are in the hands of the Crown.

*Otautau to Nightcaps*.—This is an extension of the inland line from Riverton. It will render available a very valuable coal field, and promote the cultivation of over 50,000 acres of fine agricultural land, 10,000 of which is in the hands of the Crown.

*Clutha to Catlin's River* is the commencement of a line which passes through a district containing 60,000 acres of fine agricultural freehold land. It will lead to the occupation of a territory which contains 60,000 acres of Crown land, chiefly forest.

*Waimea to Switzer's* opens up 200,000 acres of fertile land, much of which is ready for the plough, and all in the hands of the Crown.

*Lumsden to Mararoa* opens up 200,000 acres of Crown land of the finest quality, a great portion of which will, I believe, be occupied and cultivated very shortly after it is rendered accessible by rail.

*Shag Valley Branch* is a line which was intended to have been made by the Provincial Government of Otago. Surveys and working plans were prepared, and public tenders applied for and received, when abolition intervened. It commands a rich agricultural and pastoral district of 45,000 acres, of which 10,000 acres belong to the Crown, and will be one of the best paying feeders to the main line between Dunedin and Oamaru. It will, moreover, greatly facilitate access to the important gold-mining and rapidly-increasing agricultural districts of Macrae's and Hyde.

It will thus be seen that an area of nearly 4,000,000 acres of Crown land in the Middle Island will be affected by the proposed lines. Much of this land if accessible by rail, and in the market now, would realize £5 an acre and upwards. Probably we shall not be beyond the mark in estimating that it will realize to the State, at a moderate computation, little short of the whole estimated cost of the railways—viz., £4,650,000—now proposed to be made in the Middle Island.