

by the Canterbury Chamber of Commerce to travel over the districts referred to. Timber from Invercargill and Winton is now being laid down at places as far north as Ashburton (a distance of 324 miles) at lower figures than imports from Pelorus Sound can be laid down at the same place. It is estimated that, if railway communication were opened with the West Coast, consumers of timber in Canterbury would be able to obtain their supplies at an average reduction of about 1s. per 100 feet as compared with existing prices.

*Coal.*—The excellent quality for household, manufacturing, and steaming purposes of the extensive seams existing on the West Coast is so well known as to render any detailed information under this head unnecessary. The cost of Newcastle coal delivered in Christchurch is about 30s. per ton. From the West Coast coal of good quality could be laid down here by railway at 23s. per ton, which would show a saving to the consumer of about 7s. per ton. In view of the steady development of manufacturing industries in Canterbury, a rapid increase in the consumption of coal may be anticipated. Information has just been made public to the effect that the New Zealand Shipping Company is about to inaugurate a direct steam service with England, and the requirements of the steamers of this service will cause a large additional demand.

*Building Stone.*—On this subject an extract from the report of the Greymouth Committee is also annexed. The Committee of the League is of opinion that the receipts from the carriage of this article to Canterbury would probably be an important and steadily increasing item.

*General Merchandise, Agricultural Produce, and Live Stock.*—The estimated earnings in respect of these are based on the existing statistics of population on the West Coast, and, with the increase of population there that would be sure to follow the opening of railway communication with this district, a considerable augmentation of traffic under these several heads might be looked for.

The Committee of the League would further invite the attention of the Commission to the comparative statistics of land and stock, dated 30th September last, prepared by Mr. John Tinline. If a copy of this paper should not be already in the hands of the Commission, the Committee will be pleased to furnish one.

The Committee would also respectfully suggest to the Commission the advisableness of taking oral evidence from the following gentlemen regarding the respective characteristics of the various proposed routes going north, north-west, and west from Canterbury, viz.: Messrs. John Tinline, John Inglis, W. Atkinson, and Hossack. All of these gentlemen possess special personal knowledge of the features of the districts in question, and the Committee would regard their testimony as particularly trustworthy and valuable.

Having thus indicated reasons which, in the opinion of the Committee, show conclusively that the construction of a railway to connect the East and West Coasts is a colonial work that should take precedence over any work intended simply as an extension of a so-called trunk line northwards, the Committee would now beg to draw the attention of the Commission to some facts which prove that the proposed extension of the trunk line northwards by way of the East Coast, or the inland route *via* Tophouse to Blenheim, is not supported by any justifying condition either from a local or colonial point of view. Neither of these proposed routes touch country where minerals or timber exist in any quantity that could afford any traffic worthy of mention. The area of agricultural land, or any land affording encouragement for settlement, that would be opened up would be inconsiderable; and as agricultural produce could be carried by water at much lower rates from the convenient shipping places at Kaikoura and Gorse Bay, any revenue from the carriage of such produce would consequently be of the most trifling character. Moreover, as regards passenger traffic, in view of the well-appointed and yearly improving steam service now operating on the coast, it could not be reasonably expected that any considerable portion of that traffic as between Lyttelton and Wellington could ever be diverted to a railway connecting Christchurch and Picton. With railway communications completed to that point, there would still remain the sea voyage across Cook Strait, and persons travelling from Lyttelton to Wellington would, as a rule, prefer to make the voyage by steamer, as at present.

In the opinion of the Committee it is only necessary to peruse the Government Engineer's reports in order to find reasons amply sufficient to condemn this proposal of the Government to extend the Middle Island trunk line northwards by the East Coast, the Amuri coast, or the Tophouse routes. Speaking of these alternative routes, Mr. Blair says, in his report embodied in the last Public Works Statement: "My previous report shows that the resources of the country traversed, and the importance of the districts immediately connected, do not alone warrant the construction of a through line in any direction. Its main object must therefore be to connect the two ends of the colony, and, that being the case, the shortest and quickest route is obviously the best." The Committee firmly believes that railway works which would have merely for their object the connection of the two ends of the colony are entirely premature, and would, at least at this stage of the colony's progress, be productive of no public benefit commensurate to the cost.

In conclusion, the Committee, feeling confident as it does that it represents the views of the public of Canterbury as well as those of the majority of the people on the West Coast and in Nelson, cannot refrain from taking this opportunity of expressing its surprise and disappointment at the whole action of the Government in connection with this question. While considering the matter of extending the Middle Island trunk line, the Government has apparently ignored the possibilities for promoting settlement and for increasing the wealth of the colony that could be made available by the connection of the East and West Coasts by railway; and the Committee cannot help viewing with concern the existing danger that the certain prospect of the considerable traffic that would be developed by an extension of the trunk line by way of the West Coast may be sacrificed by the Government in order to give effect to the mere sentiment of completing the Middle Island trunk line by a more direct route, but by one that could not possibly yield any traffic or serve any public interest worthy of any consideration from a colonial point of view.

By order of the Committee.

W. CHRYSSTALL, Chairman.

*Note.*—The distance of 176 miles is taken as the distance between Reefton and Christchurch. When the line from Greymouth to Nelson is completed, the whole of the traffic mentioned would pass over the line from Reefton to Canterbury if that were constructed.—W. C.