

247. Where is that estate situated?—It is between the Hinds and the Rangitata Rivers.

248. Do you know whether the bulk of that estate is not nearer to the main trunk line?—Yes; it is many miles nearer.

249. Are there any other petitioners in the same category?—Yes, there are many others who signed the petition who would not be benefited. The only way they could be benefited would be by the construction of a branch line from Valetta. I forgot to say, in my earlier remarks, that the Minister for Public Works, in his Financial Statement on the 27th August, 1878, said, "Of the eight branch railways named in 'The Canterbury Railways Land Reservation Bill, 1877,' one is provided for in the general estimates and two are taken by companies, leaving five for which provision has not yet been made—namely, Oxford to Malvern line, 11 miles; Whitecliffs to Rakaia Gorge, 22 miles; Ashburton to Alford Forest, 20 miles; Albury to Fairlie Creek, 10 miles; Orari to Hilton, 13 miles: total, 70 miles.

250. *The Commissioner.*] Are you aware that twenty-one miles have been already constructed?—Yes; but they have made a considerable deviation from the original line proposed. The original line would not have been more than about twenty miles.

Mr. JOSHUA TUCKER, examined.

251. *The Commissioner.*] Are you engaged in the coal trade in the Mount Somers district?—In the Ashburton.

252. What coal is imported here?—Chiefly Newcastle.

253. Is any coal brought down the Tinwald line?—I have never known any. We have sold twenty or thirty tons, which were carted down some two years ago.

254. What price did you get for that coal?—I think about £1 10s. a ton. That was the ruling price of native coal.

255. Does that coal find a ready sale here?—As readily as the Malvern coal.

256. Are you acquainted with the Malvern coal?—Yes; we have sold about four hundred tons of it during the last year.

257. What do you think of the quality of the Mount Somers coal?—I think it is of as good quality as the Malvern coal.

258. To what cause do you attribute so little of the Mount Somers coal reaching this place?—The cost of cartage.

259. Where does the Malvern coal come from?—Some from Whitecliffs, some from Homebush, and some from Springfield.

260. Have any of those mines got to contend with the cost of cartage?—I think that Mr. McIlwraith, at Homebush, has several miles of tramway.

261. Would it not facilitate the traffic in the Mount Somers district if a similar tramway were made?—Yes, to bring it down to the railway.

262. At any rate, do you consider that, if facilities were given, you could find a large sale for that coal here?—I could sell a thousand tons. Last year we sold 2,970 tons of coal, Newcastle and native.

263. Are you acquainted with the timber trade of this place?—Yes.

264. Is there much consumption here of the timber from the Alford Forest?—We have been getting one-half by rail and one-half by road, as it is much the same thing. About sixteen tons, or four truck-loads, per week of fencing timber is what we use.

265. Is the trade capable of extension?—I believe so; in fact, on Monday last no less than six teams went up from the Ashburton to bring down firewood from Alford Forest.

266. In the four truck-loads per week do you include firewood?—No. Of firewood we sell about twelve tons per week, but there comes into the Ashburton about twenty tons per week.

267. Is there any consumption of the Alford Forest timber anywhere else but here—to the southward, for instance?—We frequently send it to the Hinds, or Rangitata, or Ealing. We have to keep a stock here and send it on from here. The greater portion of the firewood used here is brought from Waimate by train; some is brought from Mount Peel, which is carted twelve miles from the Waihi; and some from Orari, which is carted about eight miles.

268. What do you consider the total timber trade?—I think there would be about forty tons a week of fencing material and firewood.

269. Is the Alford Forest of such a character as to be capable of supplying that, as far as quality is concerned?—At present it supplies all fencing-posts and stakes, and I believe it could supply all the firewood. We have only been able to get two truck-loads of black pine firewood from the Waimate in the last four weeks, and we have had a difficulty in getting it from the Waihi Bush; so that we shall have to get our firewood either from the Peninsula or from Alford Forest.

270. Is it good firewood?—Yes; but birch is not so good as black pine.

271. *The Mayor.*] Do you think, if the railway were extended to the point indicated at Bowyer's Stream, that it would pay the farmers to cart it then?—No; they would bring it down by the railway.

272. *The Commissioner.*] You think that extending the railway to the point indicated would determine all timber traffic by train?—Well, at least seven-eighths of it: some people if there is a railway alongside their door will not use it.

273. *The Mayor.*] Is it not a fact that it takes them three days to bring a load of firewood to the Ashburton?—Yes.

274. *The Commissioner.*]—I was led to understand that in many cases it was as cheap, if not cheaper, to bring produce to Ashburton from the district in question by drays rather than by train at present?—I believe it is, at present. The carters will cart down direct by road in fine weather in preference to taking it to the Anama Station.

275. The length of the extension proposed is only about three miles and a half. Do you think that the extension for so short a distance as that will have the desired effect?—I think the distance