

*West Coast.*—The report of the Railway Commission of 1880 has a statement attached showing the acreage and description of land served by and calculated to contribute traffic to each line of railway. The agricultural lands on certain lines and sections within the area we are now dealing with are given as follows:—

	Acres.
1. Nelson-Foxhill ... ..	87,000
2. Belgrove-Brunnerton ... ..	427,350
3. East and West Coast ... ..	652,090
4. Westport-Ngakawau ... ..	18,960
Total ... ..	1,185,400

I have no means of making an exact comparison between these two statements; but the Commissioners' total ought to agree roughly with the first four items in my statement, which amount to 1,336,500 acres. With reference to the East and West Coast Railway, a special line is inserted in the schedule to the Commissioners' report, giving the area within two miles of the proposed railway. The agricultural land is given at 84,000 acres.

As regards the Nelson-West Coast line, Mr. Calcutt, in 1873, estimated the land fit for settlement between Belgrove and Brunnerton at 213,750 acres—156,000 being forest and 57,750 open land. In 1872 Mr. A. D. Dobson, C.E., reported that 222,000 acres were fit for settlement. About the same time Mr. Thomas Mackay estimated the quantity that can be utilized at 261,000 acres, but limited the agricultural land to 51,000 acres. Going still further back—to 1868—we find an estimate by the late Mr. Wrigg, C.E., of 152,000 acres of flat land within the area proposed to be given to the company that would construct the line.

The third item in my statement, which corresponds with the former estimates just quoted, is so near them that it may be taken as correct. In fact, I believe that all the quantities given by me are as close an approximation as can be obtained without an expensive survey.

*Canterbury.*—As shown by the preceding table, agricultural land specially benefited by the proposed railways within the Canterbury district is of limited extent. It is nearly all situated in the Waimakariri watershed, between the main and subsidiary ranges. The soil generally is good, being composed of sediment from the fans previously referred to, or light loam overlying limestone. Out of the total of 40,000 acres above given, fully 30,000 acres are good even land, capable of cultivation; the remainder is rough, and lying at exceptionally high levels. This is an objection urged against all the country in the Waimakariri basin: even the good land just mentioned ranges from 1,500 to 2,000 above sea-level. Wheat has never, to my knowledge, been tried; and it is supposed that it will not grow at these high altitudes. I am not sure that this is the case. Wheat grows well up to 2,000ft. in the interior of Otago; and, although there is more rain in the Waimakariri Valley, I think the summer is sufficiently hot and dry to ripen any grain crops. There is, however, no doubt as to the suitability of the country for oats, grass, and root crops.

*Nelson and Marlborough.*—The low-lying lands on the Wairau and Waimea plains are very fertile and well cultivated, but they get poor as higher levels are reached. The Wairau Valley gets very shingly about the Waihopai, and still further up the stones are imbedded in stiff clay, which grows little but manuka scrub. The valleys on the Nelson side are flatter, and consequently do not change so much, but they terminate abruptly against the steeper mountain-slope.

There is a considerable extent of flat land in the upper Buller, near Tophouse. A small portion is swamp, which makes good land when drained. The remainder is a shingly plain, covered with tussock and manuka, with occasional patches of better land.

*Valuations.*—As already shown, there is not much difficulty in determining the quantity of land on the West Coast over which the plough can pass when the bush is cleared off; but it is a different thing as regards its quality, capabilities, and value. Mr. Calcutt says, "Taking, therefore, the piece of country as a whole, and viewing it from an agricultural and pastoral point of view, it is not, in my opinion, adapted for the permanent settlement and support of a large number of people." In my report of 1879 I said, "So far as my judgment goes I can corroborate all that Mr. Calcutt says as to the indifferent character of the land and its limited area."

If we look at the matter from an Otago and Canterbury point of view, as I have no doubt Mr. Calcutt did, and as I certainly did myself, there is no occasion to alter or modify these opinions even after such a long lapse of years. The most zealous advocate of the railways does not claim that the West Coast is suited for rapid settlement by an agricultural population. But, if the forest lands of the North are taken as the standard, and an allowance made for a gradual settlement of the country as the timber is utilized, the land must be assumed as of some considerable value. In Otago and Canterbury the plough can be put direct into the tussock, and a good crop of wheat got the first year; and at the time my report was written the profit on that first crop was more than the price of the land. In the bush lands of the North farms are hewn laboriously out of the forest, and it generally takes ten or fifteen years before the plough can be used. Of course the land has not been unproductive all this time: there is in most cases some return from the timber to commence with, and grazing begins from the first year.

In this lies the whole question as regards the value of the West Coast lands: Can they be reclaimed and settled in the way adopted in other bush districts throughout the colony? After remarking that certain localities would, no doubt, grow excellent grass if cleared, and that the climate seemed quite unsuitable for the raising of grain, the East and West Coast Railway Commission of 1883 said with reference to this subject, "The most important feature in considering the West Coast as a farming district undoubtedly is the dense forest with which the whole country is covered. The present cost of felling and burning the bush is out of all proportion to the value of the land when cleared; and, owing to the humidity of the climate, underscrub and rushes soon appear unless the land is ploughed."