



THE HON. SIR J. G. WARD, K.C.M.G.,
Premier of New Zealand, Minister for Railways
during the Seddon Administration.

..North Island.. Main Trunk Line.

A NATIONAL UNDERTAKING.

BY OUR SPECIAL COMMISSIONER.



THE HON. W. HALL-JONES,
Minister for Public Works and Railways.

PART I.

EVERY New Zealand colonist who takes any interest in the progress of his country has also an interest in the construction of the North Island Main Trunk Railway, but few are aware of the tremendous amount of pioneering energy and endurance, engineering skill and patient constructive industry which has already been expended, and must still be continued, before our national railway is an accomplished fact. The recent statement of the Minister for Public Works that he hopes to have the trams running all the way from Auckland to Wellington in about a couple of years has brought the subject prominently before the public, for there can be no difference of opinion as to the convenience, and even necessity, of such a railway for commercial purposes, while its value as a factor in settling the interior, and thereby contributing to the general prosperity of the colony, can be scarcely over-estimated. In the centre of the North Island the colony possesses splendid assets in the enormous area of magnificent timber suitable for milling and conversion into wealth; an immense area of unused land, much of it of first-class quality; and wonderful mountain, forest and river scenery. The latter, though not so readily convertible, is none the less valuable, for it remains the property of the people, and is for ever the glory of the country and a source of enjoyment to our population and of wonder to our kin who visit us from over the seas. Few city dwellers have had the opportunity of viewing the panorama of the central mountain group—the snow-topped Ruapehu and Tongariro, with the weird-looking Ngauruhoe, and its continually steaming crater between. The means of access hitherto have been such that only few could take advantage of them, but the completion of the Main Trunk Line will afford a ready and comfortable means of obtaining one of the grandest views of mountain and forest scenery in all the world. The splendid timber resources, which are already being tapped at each end by the Line, will contribute in no small degree to the earnings of the railway and to the revenues of the State by royalties, and if the forest on such of the land as is best fitted to bear a timber crop is only re-planted as it is cut out, this source of revenue, both as regards freight and royalty may be made more or less of a permanent character. Much of the country is suitable for dairying or grazing after the timber has been felled, and will in time carry a fair population, which could hardly exist there without railway communication; while the line will undoubtedly serve another most useful purpose in supplying the native landholders with an inducement either to make their lands productive themselves, or to dispose of them to Europeans. In the future, too, when New Zealand takes her destined place among the nations, we shall have a strategical railway of supreme importance, secure against hostile attentions from the sea.

HISTORY OF THE UNDERTAKING.

The history of the Line presents some novel features, and, in view of the interest aroused by the approaching completion of the work, the

This article was prepared by Mr. H. J. H. Blow, Under-Secretary of Public Works, with the assistance of Messrs. Holmes, Hursthouse and Ronayne. All were senior officers closely associated with the undertaking. The account of the incident with the Maoris, and of the turning of the first sod is first hand from Mr. Hursthouse. The above is evident from papers on Ministry of Works file 19/577.



NORTH ISLAND MAIN TRUNK RAILWAY:

TYPICAL COUNTRY THROUGH WHICH A GREAT PART OF THE RAILWAY HAS BEEN CONSTRUCTED.