

it appear to us improbable that traffic could be carried profitably over either of them ; and, the season being too late for careful and prolonged observations, we reluctantly abandoned our intention of traversing those two routes.

Population.

In examining into the questions referred to us by your Excellency, we first considered the population on both sides of the Island as it at present exists—an easy task, as the census returns of 1881 were obtainable, which revealed, however, the remarkably unsatisfactory fact that the people of Westland had diminished from 16,932, in the year 1878, to 15,010, in 1881, a loss of 1,922, of whom 1,502 were males. The total population of the West Coast, including Westport, is returned as 24,214, and reference to the decennial return proves it has been stationary since 1872. It was frequently asserted on the West Coast that the population was again increasing, which possibly may be the case ; but, as no reliable evidence in confirmation of the statement was brought before us, we can at most believe the increase has been small.

Centres of population.

Under present circumstances, it is difficult to say where the principal centres of population may in the future be situated. Those which depend for their existence on alluvial digging cannot be predicted : the shifting and transitory nature of that employment is such that it can only be a few years before the busiest centres of such industry will be deserted ; nevertheless, there is a large area of alluvial ground, and a great many years must elapse before it is all worked out. The alluvial workings extend from south of Hokitika to north of the Buller, the most important being those at Kumara, half-way between Hokitika and Greymouth. Populations engaged in crushing quartz will probably have a longer fixed location, and evidence was tendered to the Commission to show that reefs at present known in the Inangahua District would last for forty years ; and there is always the probability of others being discovered. The principal quartz reefs are near Reefton.

Timber industries would naturally gather the population round the most extensive forests, and the best growth of marketable timber is situated in the Lake Brunner District, the valleys of the Arnold, Grey, Lower Teremakau, and Hokitika Rivers. Elsewhere the forests are principally black birch, which is not extensively used, except for railway construction.

Coal-mining would most likely attract the principal resident population.

The Commission came to the conclusion that the centre of traffic and population would be near Greymouth, and opinions taken in evidence on this point were unanimous, with the exception of those expressed at Reefton.

The terminus of the line on the East Coast would naturally be the City of Christchurch, which, with its suburbs and Lyttelton, contains 27,800 people ; but consideration must also be given to another matter of equal importance, viz., the best distributing point for the different centres of population likely to consume the products to be carried by a railway.

The Counties of Amuri, Cheviot, and Ashley, to the north of Christchurch, contained, by the census returns of 1881, a population of 15,236 ; while the Counties of Akaroa, Ashburton, Geraldine, and Waimate, in the south, contained 35,006. In addition to this, the ridings of the County of Selwyn, to the south of Christchurch, contained 22,748 ; and the ridings to the north, 11,575.

It therefore appears that a population of 57,784 would be benefited by a distributing point to the south of Christchurch, against 26,811 interested in a northern line. We have in this comparison taken no notice of any population south of the Waitaki ; though, as we had evidence that timber from Invercargill comes as far north as Ashburton—a distance of 314 miles—it would not be unreasonable to suppose consumers as far south as Oamaru might benefit by a railway joining the trunk line to the south of Christchurch, the distance from Brunnerton to Oamaru being 262 miles.

By far the densest population is at present located to the south of Christchurch ; and, although a large increase will take place in future years, there is no reason to believe the districts to the north are ever likely to become more thickly populated than those to the south.

Land on West Coast.

The West Coast, so far as visited by the Commission, appeared to contain little land suitable for agriculture ; though there is a considerable amount of level and terrace land on the Lower Teremakau, Hokitika, and Little Grey Rivers, and all around Lake Brunner, which appears to be of a fair to good quality, and no doubt, if cleared, would grow excellent grass. The climate, however, seems quite unsuitable for the raising of grain. But the most important factor 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