

the company you must ask whether there was land elsewhere in the colony fit for settlement, and whether there was sufficient of it; and if it can be shown that there was land elsewhere in the colony available for settlement, then, plainly, there has been no loss, because the demand for settlement has been satisfied. Mr. Bell will tell you that there is not so good land elsewhere for settlement. But the answer to that is that you are settling inferior land. Then, if there is any charge to be made against the company for the locking-up of this better land, it can only be based on the difference to the colony between the settling of poor land and the settling of good land, if any, in Canterbury, Westland, and Nelson. But you will observe that what is done here is, a claim is made for a dead loss to the colony for all that land, labour and capital could have done on the reserved area in ten years. My answer to that is that if there is any claim for that loss, then there must be set against it all the capital spent and cost of labour in improving the land. It is assumed in these calculations of Mr. Bell's, and by his witnesses, that because that capital and labour have not been expended in Nelson and Westland it has been lying idle—that it has not been expended elsewhere—it has been wasted. Such a contention is absolutely absurd. I invite you to assume that if this capital and labour were not expended in Nelson and Westland, then they were being expended elsewhere in the colony, and have produced those very benefits which Mr. Bell claims should be set up here as a counter-claim against the company. That seems to me to upset the whole of the argument on the part of the Crown under this head. If you look at Mr. Humphries's evidence alone you will see how utterly illogical is the way in which this counter-claim is made out. Again, if you look at the claim for loss on account of population you will find these curious results: that one witness, Mr. Acton-Adams, places it at £30,000, Mr. Mueller places it at £31,500, Mr. Louisson places it at £250,000, and Mr. Bayfield makes it £691,000. These gentlemen are the Crown's own witnesses. You heard Mr. Acton-Adams give his estimate at £30,000, and then you had this peculiar incident—an incident, I should say, almost unknown in your experience: Mr. Acton-Adams gave his evidence, and then other witnesses for the Crown were asked questions, not by Mr. Bell, but by Mr. Seddon, to lead them to throw discredit on the Crown's own witness, Mr. Acton-Adams, who had given his sworn testimony. This mode of examination was not adopted by Mr. Bell, but Mr. Seddon put questions which went to discredit the sworn evidence of that witness, whom the Crown had brought from Canterbury to give his evidence before this Committee. He gave it as his opinion that the loss would be about £250,000; and then it was deemed prudent to put questions to other witnesses as to whether Mr. Adams had any experience on the West Coast, and whether he was in a position to form any judgment as to what would be the loss to the colony. I pass rapidly over the loss to local bodies. The only evidence with respect to this item that I could find was Mr. Mueller's, of £11,300 which he put down for "thirds." It will be noticed that at the bottom of page 52 of the evidence Mr. Mueller says: "The figures referring to Westland would certainly have been obtained if the Midland Railway contract had never been entered into." Then we wander into the region of the wildest speculation. We are told that the general loss to the colony is £2,000,000. I have dealt with the different headings under which this loss is estimated, and I do not want to weary the Committee by going into further details. Mr. Bell says that this evidence is just and reliable, but surely no one can consider that evidence just and reliable. A reference to my analysis will show that the evidence is of a very erratic character, bordering on the ludicrous. Then we had the Manawatu railway dragged in again. It is curious how the illustration of the Manawatu railway resembles Artemus Ward's statue. It does for almost anything. At one time it is of great use to the Government in showing by contrast that our railway is quite evidently of no use and will not pay. The Government at that time say that the comparison between the two is ridiculous—that the Manawatu line is utterly different in all its conditions from this; and then the next thing they do is to bring it in as evidence of what the Midland Railway would have done if completed. Now the two lines are the same, and this is used to show the great damage which the colony has sustained through the non-construction of our railway. In 1892 the Government witnesses said the two lines were not to be compared at all; 1900 the two lines would have had same career and same effect on colony. Mr. Gordon, in giving his evidence before the Committee in 1892—he was a witness for the Government—one of their experts. He is asked,—

Looking at the scope of the country drained by this line and that, say, by the Manawatu line, do you think that the traffic on this line will be as much as that on the Manawatu line?—There is no comparison between them. A large proportion of the country along the Manawatu line is settled. A large proportion of country along this (Midland Railway) line is not settled, and never can be, as it is not fit for settlement.

That, sir, is the answer of an expert, who says that there is no comparison between the Manawatu Railway and the Midland Railway. But then this counter-claim arises, and again the Manawatu Railway is brought in, and an endeavour is made to show that there is the greatest resemblance between the two. It will be of advantage to give a few more of Mr. Gordon's answers. Mr. Gordon is asked—

In your opinion, is the country at the end of the Manawatu line, and as far as Palmerston North and up to Hawke's Bay and Taranaki, drained by the Manawatu Railway, better than the country this Midland Railway passes through?—I do not think the West Coast is such good country as that; the traffic would not be so much in regard to some things with which merchants would require to be supplied.

Are you aware of the gross receipts of the Manawatu Railway Company?—No, I do not know.

In the estimate of the merchandise that is suggested as likely to be carried over this line, are you aware that the trade is at present in the hands of Dunedin and Wellington merchants?—A good portion of the trade is from Wellington.

All merchandise in the shape of goods goes to the West Coast by sea from Wellington. According to the rates to be charged by the Midland Railway Company's proposals, could merchants take this into account and get their supplies by sea cheaper than by railway?—They could get them one-third cheaper by sea.

You mean one-third of the carriage?—Yes.

There is the evidence of an expert who certainly knew as much about what he was talking about as some of the witnesses whom we have had before us on this occasion. He tells us that there is