

82. *Mr. J. Allen* (to the witness).] With regard to the gold and the timber, I do not suppose you mean the Committee to assume that the gold or the timber is lost to the colony. It is there still, although it has not been won?—Undoubtedly the gold is there.

83. The loss is owing to the fact that we have not converted it into capital at all in the early days?—The only difference is that it would be years before the gold is obtained; but the trees would grow again.

84. Those cut down do not increase in value?—No. We have suffered a great deal by the want of being able to develop these industries, and naturally we feel it. The pastoral industry may overtake the loss, but I do not think it will be of any great value to us.

Mr. WILLIAM ACTON-ADAMS in attendance, and examined on oath.

85. *Mr. Bell.*] You are a barrister and solicitor?—I prefer to be called a sheep-farmer.

86. What public offices do you now hold?—I am chairman of the Hospital Board, and have lately been twice elected to that position. I represent the counties of Cheviot and Amuri on that Board, and I am chairman.

87. You have been a member of Parliament?—Yes; and I have also been a member of the Provincial Council of Nelson.

88. How long have you been resident in New Zealand?—I came to the colony in 1850.

89. You have resided principally in the Nelson and Marlborough Districts?—Yes; and lately in Canterbury.

90. You are acquainted with the country in the Nelson and Marlborough Districts?—Yes; I have seen all that country. I have seen Blenheim when there was only one small whare there and a few Natives.

91. You were chairman of the Railway League in Canterbury in 1884?—Yes; I should say I was elected a member of it in 1878, and afterwards, when I went to Canterbury, I was elected chairman of the East and West Coast and Nelson Railway League.

92. You, and those who were associated with you at that time, advocated the construction of a railway to connect with coast and Nelson?—Yes.

93. And you endeavoured to promote it?—Yes, I did, and had done so for years.

94. Were you of opinion that its construction would be a benefit to the colony?—I thought it would be a great benefit to the colony as a whole, and particularly to the districts with which I was acquainted, and with which could only be reached by bush tracks which were very difficult to travel over. I went once up the Inangahua River when there was no way of getting through the bush, and we had to ride through the water up the river to get at our destination.

95. Have you seen any reason to change your opinion?—No, certainly not. I am still of the opinion that the colony would have progressed considerably more if this railway had been constructed.

96. Then you remain of the opinion which you held in 1884, that the construction of this line would have conferred a great benefit on the colony?—Yes.

97. You heard Mr. Humphries speak of the Tadmire Valley: Do you know the land there?—Yes; I know it and all the country there.

98. Is there good land there?—Yes.

99. A considerable area?—No. The valley is about a mile wide. There are about 25,000 acres of good land there—that is, the level land. The hills are not so good.

100. There is another valley which has been mentioned, and which is of the same kind?—I think he spoke of the Sherry Valley, and Wangapeka; and he also referred to the Marawera Valley, in answer to a question by Mr. Graham.

101. Is that good land?—Not as a whole. There are patches of swampy land which are good, but there is a good deal of stony land.

102. Speaking of the forest land, is there a large quantity of that which would be suitable for settlement?—All the lands suitable for that purpose are in patches of a few hundred acres each, or sometimes more. They would be suitable for close settlement. There is plenty of wood and water there, which would be good for settlers.

103. Are you speaking of the land in the blue area?—Of the land along the Buller tributaries and in the Grey Valley.

104. Coming to the benefit to be derived from the construction of the railway, you gentlemen anticipated that under the contract which was entered into this blue patch, which was put on the map in 1885, would have been removed, and that the land there would not remain in its then condition: Does it still remain there?—Yes.

105. The railway should have been completed in January, 1895?—Yes.

106. I ask you to assume that the railway cannot be completed for four years further from this date?—Yes.

107. Have these two circumstances resulted in injury to the colony?—Taking the progress of settlement, I think, on a moderate estimate, with the completion of the railway the rateable value of this district would have increased—as far as Canterbury and Westland are concerned—about £5,000 per annum, and in Nelson £1,000. I think also that the increase in population by means of the railway only, and without any regard to rushes for gold, would have been a thousand annually. I think that is a fair statement of the effect of the completion of the railway, without taking into consideration dredging operations or anything of that kind. People are worth about £3 per head of population to the revenues of the colony, and that would make £3,000 a year. I do not know whether you want me to speak as to the timber and coal. We went into the thing very closely, and had the advantage of Government experts, and we came to the conclusion that, as far as Canterbury is concerned, the railway could not compete with the water-carriage. The coastal rate is about 10s. a ton, and the railway charge would be about the same. The agent of