

they gave. There is one thing, gentlemen, I should like specially to draw your attention to, and that is the very unjust way in which the present system deals with the country settlers, and I say that this is the real blot in the railway system, and until it is got over by some means you can never make a real success of the railways. When I started to study this question I studied all sorts of plans of meeting that difficulty by means of through rates. The late Mr. Charles Waring, of London, who wrote the work on "The State Purchase of Railways," tried to get over it also by what he called a "distance scale," charging a much less rate per mile for the long distance than for the short. But that all resolves itself into the question of through rates, which always go to the benefit of the big cities. I should like to draw the attention of the Committee to the fact that, taking the working of that table of Mr. Fife's in 1886, the passengers who travelled ten miles and under formed 68·8 of the whole, and they paid 24·1 of the revenue. Then, if you take from ten miles to not exceeding fifty miles, the passengers were 25·3 of the whole, but they had to pay 39·2 of the revenue. You will see that those country settlers paid a great deal more, and that they were not the most distant country settlers. They paid a great deal more than the town and suburban users of the railway toward the revenue. Then, if you take the distance of over fifty miles, there were only 5·9 of the travellers, and they had to pay 36·7 of the revenue. So that you see that less than 6 per cent. of the community were compelled to pay 50 per cent. more of revenue than the 69 per cent. had to pay. Now, I know, of course, that the short-distance traveller you must have, and that they will pay a less gross sum; but I say the present proportion as shown on this table is altogether out of order, and cannot be conducive either to the good of the railway revenue or to the good of the country. You will find all the details of what I have been saying in Mr. Fife's table. There is another thing I want to draw the Committee's attention to, and that is the census. One of my great objections to this system, and, in fact, my great objection to it, is that the present system concentrates the population in the great cities. I may mention that all my lifetime I have been studying the poverty problem, and I have come to the conclusion that the real cause of the poverty that exists in the world is the inability of the people to make proper use of the land; but how to remedy that I did not see, until other circumstances—questions of business—led me to study the railway problem. Then I saw how intimately the two things were connected. I found it was the railway system that was responsible for piling up the population in the great cities, and decreasing it in the small country towns. During most of the sixties I lived in England, and mainly in London. In travelling over the country there I noticed notifications of butter-markets stuck up here and there; but, on inquiring where they were, I was told that there were no butter-markets there now, but that they were in one of the large centres. You would see notices of cattle-markets stuck up here and there in the same way, but you would find, on inquiring, that all these local markets had been swept away, and had gone into London, Liverpool, or some other large centre. Precisely the same thing is going on now in New Zealand, and with accelerated speed. From the first, I maintained that this would be the result. For instance, take the last census return, and you will find that out of ninety-five boroughs twenty-seven have decreased in population during the last ten years—that is, since the 31st March, 1891; and I want to draw the Committee's attention to the fact that this decrease has taken place most largely in those districts which are best served by the railways, and I take it that that is just a contrary condition of things to what ought to exist. Now, of those twenty-seven boroughs that have decreased in population, nine are in the North Island—two being on the Auckland Section, and seven on the Wellington-Taranaki-Hawke's Bay Section, the latter section being where they have much greater railway facilities than we have in Auckland. Then, if you come to the South Island, you will find that eighteen boroughs have declined in population there, and nearly all of them are on the Hurunui-Bluff Section. In the North Island one other borough is also practically at a standstill—the population is just about the same as it was five years ago—and five more in the South Island are in the same position, showing that a large decrease of the population of these smaller towns has taken place. Now, if you will compare the five years from 1891 to 1895 you will find that all the boroughs then connected with the railways in the North Island increased in their population, while in the South Island several of them decreased. The Auckland Section of railways have not had nearly as much influence on Auckland as the other sections of railway have had on the large towns in the South. I take it that the reason of this is that the railways as they are now worked afford greater facilities for concentration; and I am quite certain about this: that if we let the North Island Main Trunk Railway get through and connect Auckland and Wellington, the fight between Auckland and Wellington will commence for these small towns, and they will be gradually wiped out—that is, assuming you continue the present system. Very well, then, Auckland being the larger and more attractive of the cities, it is pretty certain to win the fight. This question of the depopulation of the country towns is a most serious thing, not only from the social point of view, but from the railway point of view, because you have the less number of carrying points to take goods and people to. The carrying trade between these towns would be very great if you had a number of them. If you take the influence on the whole of the country, it works out thus: In 1891 the county population was 56·18 of the whole, and the borough population 43·82. Take the next census, 1896, and the county population had declined to 55·69, and the borough population had increased to 44·31. At the last census the county population was 54·04, and the borough population was 45·96. So we see this, gentleman, that notwithstanding all our efforts to settle the land the proportion of county population is gradually decreasing, while the proportion of town population is continually increasing. Now, I do not think that is conducive to the welfare of the towns or the country. In ten years the country population, as compared with the towns, has declined 2·14 per cent. During the first half of the decade the population declined 1·49, or less than $\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., while in the latter half it has declined 1·65. Now, the accelerated speed with which the depopulation of the country is going on is a most serious matter and demands close attention. The country is being depopulated and the people piled up in the towns. That