

been. The Committee has travelled through the southern part of Taranaki, and no doubt has been impressed by its wonderful fertility. There is, however, a very large area of land lying north of Mount Messenger and right up to Kawhia and inland towards the Wanganui River which is yet to a great extent undeveloped. When you travel from New Plymouth, at thirty-two miles north you come to Mount Messenger and mud, and from there on for forty-five miles on the main road between New Plymouth and Auckland there is not a scrap of metal. There is none until you come well into the Waitomo County. Much of the country is of very good quality indeed, but the whole of its production is more or less hampered by inefficient means of communication. That is going to be the more felt as the port of New Plymouth develops, because this port is the natural outlet for all the wool and other produce of that huge area. One of the difficulties in the way of metalling the road north of Mount Messenger is the absence of good metal. I understand, however, that that has been got over, and now considerable deposits of suitable road-metal are to be found at Uruti, and the work which has been authorized for Mount Messenger could well be continued for the rest of the journey. The second barrier to progress is the Mokau River, which is not bridged, consequently there are serious delays in getting over by a primitive punt, and there is also loss of stock occasioned by crossing the river by swimming. There are over 100,000 sheep in the Awakino County, and undoubtedly the county has its natural outlet at New Plymouth. All the sheep and cattle for Awakino have to pass over the river. In the next place, after passing Awakino a few miles there is a huge hill, which is exceedingly rough. It can be avoided, of course, by travelling along the Awakino Valley road. That road has been formed for all but six miles, which distance is not yet completed, presumably owing to the difficulty the Government have in doing such work. If Mount Messenger were metalled, the intervening distance metalled to the Mokau Bridge, and the Awakino Valley road completed, there would be a level road from New Plymouth almost to Te Kuiti, and that road would become the main road from New Plymouth to Auckland. Whilst I was in Awakino and other parts of the district the wool-stores were crammed with wool, and the only chance to get it away is by motor-launch. Further, I wish to say that there are huge deposits of coal in the Mokau River district that were worked for years, but had to cease on account of the snagging up of the Mokau River. It is possible to put roads to the coal-mines. In Taranaki we pay huge prices for coal, and more coal will be required to run the dairy factories and other industries. Then it is probable that no fertilizer is more required here than lime, and there are millions of tons of it in the Kawhia district, but we cannot get it here because there are no roads. A huge saving could be effected by bringing the lime from our own district, because it is only fifty miles from New Plymouth. From the point of view of the productiveness of the Dominion, there is a huge area of land held back from serving the country merely by reason of the fact that there is no proper means of communication. Subject to what engineers may say, I think it would pay the country to road it and rail it, and to make a line from Waitara to Te Kuiti, or somewhere farther north. I believe a route was actually surveyed for part of the distance, but why it was not gone on with I do not know. This line opens up different country from the Stratford line. There is a belt of thirty miles between the two.

*To the Chairman:* It would be possible for the settlers of north Taranaki to combine and put down a light railway to take the heavy traffic off the roads. The difficulty, however, is that at the present time the district is too sparsely settled. The idea is an excellent one for the district between New Plymouth and Opunake, and if a railway were placed there the productive power of the land would be greatly increased. The rateable value of the land in north Taranaki is too low to enable the money to be borrowed. A light railway up the coast would stimulate production to a great extent. It would give an immediate outlet for the whole of that country. I submit it is eminently a fair proposition for the Government, and it would pay them handsomely to do it.

E. MAXWELL examined.

I am an enthusiastic tree-planter. Without adequate timber-supplies no country can be fully progressive. Timber enters largely into every industry, directly or indirectly. It is of the utmost importance, too, that the timber should be cheap. This country, however, is now approaching a timber famine rapidly, and it has to realize that there are not the supplies available outside. It would not be so serious if there was a reasonable hope of foreign supplies. The world generally, however, is rapidly approaching a timber famine. Take Germany, for instance, which is ahead of the world in producing her own timber. She was the pioneer practically in scientific forestry, and yet she is enormously short of her needs of timber, and has to import vast quantities. It is essential to the general industries of this country to have adequate timber-supplies and to have our own. I contend that the State forests will not properly meet our needs. Every locality in the country should as far as possible provide its own requirements. If you have to carry a low-class timber a long distance you will have a very costly material, and to avoid that you must provide your supplies within your own locality. It is essential, too, for the welfare of the country that every district should have its plantations distributed throughout the whole district. The three main requirements in timber are round, split, and hewn timber; good building-timber; and good case-timber. The whole of our requirements are to be obtained from a selection of gums, and for every district in New Zealand a good selection could be made of gums that would grow rapidly. Of course, what would be useful in North Auckland would not be suitable in Taranaki, and so in other parts. These trees would provide the needs of fuel, fencing, round timbers, electric poles, bridge-material, and so on, as well as the stronger class of timber required in construction. As to building-timber, for a long time I have been collecting a great deal of data in connection with the rate of growth of trees in this country and in other countries. I have tabulated the information, and will supply a copy of it to the Committee.