

take a few days longer than formerly, these vessels are in a position to carry cargo at reduced rates, while still giving a larger profit. Further improvement is still being made, and I have been informed that two new steamers have been ordered to be built, having a large carrying capacity, with a minimum consumption of coal, and with speed sufficient to do the voyage in about four days less than at present obtains. What is wanted is concentration of cargoes, and the giving of the whole of the freights to certain lines. The companies being thus assured of full cargoes and quick despatch would be enabled to make further reductions, more especially if products were concentrated at the several points where cool-stores are erected. To give some idea of the excessive freights charged, a statement compiled by the Secretary of Customs will be laid upon the table of the House. From this it will be seen that last year New Zealand producers paid £459,913 more than they would have been called upon to pay if the rates here had been similar to those current in Victoria. The Australian Governments have made contracts with the shipping companies. Cargoes are concentrated and given to particular firms, and producers receive the advantage of reduced freights. When attending the Ministerial fruit conference in Melbourne recently, we found that the freights ruling in respect to the export of apples was about 4s. 6d. per case. On offers being invited, one was received stipulating for a given quantity per steamer, and the freight would then be reduced 50 per cent. With a view to concentration, the colonies of Tasmania, Victoria, New South Wales, and South Australia were invited to combine. There ought also to be combination here. Farmers, agriculturists, meat-freezing companies, pastoralists, and dairy producers should have kept together. By such a combination fair rates would have been assured. I hope it is not yet too late for this to be done; and, if freights are not arranged by and through the Government, at all events they ought to be arranged by and through the representatives of the several lines of producers. In conclusion, I am of the opinion that whatever company gives us reasonable inward and outward freights, with regular despatch at short intervals, it would be to our advantage to stand by them. The destiny of the direct lines of shipping companies rests in their own hands. I do not forget that in the past they have rendered good service to the colony; but they have, during late years, been well paid therefor. To be in a position to fairly compete, our producers must have low freights; and it is our bounden duty to obtain this for them.

OCEAN MAIL-SERVICES.

As honourable members are aware, the present San Francisco mail-contract will expire shortly. At the present time we are paying 11s. per pound for letters, and the total amount paid by the colony to the contractors is about £7,600 per annum. The American Government grants a subsidy equal to about £28,000 a year. This, however, is only of a temporary character, and will expire on the 30th June next. From Auckland to San Francisco is the shorter of the two Pacific routes, the distance being something like 5,897 miles. From Wellington to Vancouver, *via* Fiji, is 6,555 miles. Our present contract between San Francisco and Auckland is twenty days. This can be easily shortened, as recently two trips have been made in two days less than contract time. A 17-knot boat can do the distance in less than fifteen days. Take four days and a half to five for the overland route to New York, and five days and a half to six from New York to England, and our mails would be landed in London in twenty-five days.

Recently a contract was entered into between the Canadian and British Governments for a 21-knot-boat service between Great Britain and Canada. To Vancouver from Halifax would be six days, or about eleven days and a half from London. The total annual subsidy payable is £154,500, of which the British Government is to pay £51,500, to be applied specifically to the establishing of a fast service between Canada and England. One condition on which the subsidy was promised was that it should be regarded as in aid of the accomplishment of the Pacific no less than the Atlantic section of the scheme. It was at the same time made clear that no additional subsidy was to be looked for from