

83. Was there any primage in that business last year?—No. We “nailed our colours to the mast” and said there should be no primage.

84. *Mr. Wason.*] You told us that you had got to pay more and more. Does that apply to primage or to a fixed rate?—The agents are getting a larger proportion.

85. Did that apply to primage?—Yes. They get more in other directions.

86. Then the primage is not varied?—I think they get a larger proportion of it. Primage was raised to 10 per cent. on steamers.

87. Do you adhere to that statement that the primage has increased of late years?—The primage has increased on steamers. The primage on sailing-vessels is constant.

88. You have not got to pay more on sailing-vessels?—My statement was that the agents got more and more. They get more than the primage—they get extra rebates.

89. Then you told us that primage should be refunded?—No, not that it should be refunded, but that if it was refunded to our agents, they should give it to us.

90. I took you to say “refunded, and a charge made for the work done”?—Refunded by the agent to his principal.

91. How was it you told us that the primage should be returned to the ships?—I said “kept by the shippers.”

92. Not charged at all?—They should charge and keep it if they like to charge it. It is immaterial to me whether they call it freight or primage. It comes to so many pounds, shillings, and pence.

93. Primage, according to the statement here, amounted to 3s. on 1,127 lb. wool?—That is on the seven bales. On that particular five bales of wool it came to 3s. Of course, they happened to be very light bales.

94. If that had been charged at so much per bale—if at 7d. per bale—it would have been the same thing?—It happened to be specially light there, and that affects the calculation.

95. Do you think the producer is seriously injured by this charge of primage appearing on the account sales?—I think the producer is injured, and the whole trade is injured very seriously, because no one knows what he is paying, and the agent is getting it.

96. Is it not generally recognised by the average producer of the country that primage is paid for services rendered?—I should think that not one in a hundred knew before the appearance of this letter.

97. *Mr. McLean.*] When you went into this question of primage I suppose you saw some of the merchants about it, and asked for an explanation as to why they charged it?—I got at it in various directions. I made sure of my facts. I found the result of my asking merchants generally was a denial that there was any refund. It was very closely hidden up for a long time.

98. There is a difference of 5 per cent. on steamers and sailing-vessels. It is 10 per cent. on steamers?—Yes.

99. Did you get any information upon that?—No; I never considered it my business to inquire whether the primage was 5, 10, or 50 per cent. that the ships got. My point was what was done with it.

100. When a merchant ships produce for a farmer how do you think he ought to remunerate himself? Is he only to charge the bare cost of shipment?—He ought to get as much as he can for doing the work, but he must make a distinct charge. It is a mere matter of competition.

101. That covers the bare expenses?—Yes.

102. Well, how does the merchant remunerate himself?—That is his business. I am speaking of actual experience and say 6d. per bale is sufficient. The business with which I am connected would be glad to ship all the wool in New Zealand at that price.

103. In connection with this primage, you say it is 5 per cent. in the bill of lading. Well now, is it not a fact that the merchants have to get in addition to that a bonus from the shipowner for shipping produce?—That is going outside the primage, on which I wish to give evidence; it is a separate branch.

104. Is primage charged on frozen mutton?—Yes.

105. The same as on wool?—Not necessarily the same, but there is a primage, and there it is objectionable too—very objectionable. I mean the mode of distributing it.

106. Well, seeing that the bill of lading has always stated upon it so much per cent. primage, do you not think that most of those who ship wool are aware of the existence of the primage?—They are aware of the existence of the primage. The merest child must be aware of that, but the point is, when the ship has got it what is done with it? When the ship uses that for giving our agents something, for doing nothing, we say it is wrong in principle.

107. Is this not given to the merchants as a sort of bonus for bringing business?—I suppose the shipping companies do not give it for nothing; they get a *quid pro quo*.

108. Formerly it was given to the captain for getting cargo?—Yes. In many cases it has amounted to this: “You keep quiet about reduced freights, and we will give you a little more.” That is what it has practically meant, and but for that we might have had reductions in freight.

109. *Mr. Buchanan.*] Do I understand you rightly to state that you do not object to the ship charging primage at so much per cent. on the freight?—Exactly; that is only part of the freight. It does not matter to me whether you call it freight or primage. It is the total.

110. Am I right in supposing that your whole objection can be boiled down to this: that the agent is paid his primage by the ships to an amount far in excess of his services rendered?—Yes.

111. Can you tell the Committee how much per bale of 400 lb. the steamer primage amounts to?—2s. 1d. per bale.

112. What service does the agent perform to the producer in the matter of agency for this 2s. 1d. per bale?—That has always been what I have been trying anxiously to find out, but cannot do so.

113. Can you not point to what his services are so that we may have it in evidence?—They