

that I noticed the difference. The colour was better, and the sheep, taking them all through, were, I thought, more regular. We may have some of our sheep on this Island as good in parts where the country is more level and the sheep are fed off turnips. If that is done we may turn out as good sheep in appearance as they do in Canterbury; but, taking it as a rule, we depend on the grass in the whole country.

51. Have you come to any conclusion as to the difference in value of the respective freezers?—No, I cannot say that I have. There are other people who are much more likely to give you more correct information on that subject than I am able to do.

52. *Mr. Field.*] Is there any discontent as to the price obtained for sheep in the Gisborne district?—I do not know that there is. I believe the season has opened at 16s., and I believe the farmers are quite satisfied that it is a fair thing.

53. Who are the buyers in that district?—Nelson Bros. and Dalgety and Co. have dealt very largely in the farmers' co-operative freezing-works.

54. Do the North British and Hawke's Bay Company operate there at all?—No, I do not think they extend their operations so far as that. They do not go beyond Wairoa.

55. And the persons who buy your sheep honestly bid against one another—there is no combination to keep down the prices?—No, I have known the competition to be very good.

ANDREW CLELAND, of Southerland's, Representative of the Farmers' Union of South Canterbury; also Representative of the Timaru Agricultural and Pastoral Association, examined. (No. 19.)

56. *The Chairman.*] You are aware of the object for setting up this Committee. Would you care to make a statement to the Committee, or would you rather answer questions?—I have come to support a resolution that was passed by the Pleasant Point Farmers' Union, and sent on to you.

57. You desire to put the resolution before the Committee and speak to it?—Yes. The resolution was: "That the Government be asked to guarantee London prices for several shipments of meat to provincial ports, such prices to be fixed according to grade and date of sale." Since taking up this question I find that there are more difficulties in the way than I thought, and I would recommend that the freezing companies be empowered to collect 1d. on each carcase of mutton exported, and 3d. per quarter for beef, to make up for any possible loss to the Government. I maintain that the very fact of having Government guarantee at the back of shippers would prevent the Argentine people cutting down prices, because it would be suicidal for them to cut prices if we had a guarantee of regular shipments. I am also aware that there are vested interests in London that are likely to oppose this scheme; but I think the Government guarantee would have the effect of converting these possible enemies and turning them into allies, and that they would establish branches in the ports suggested, and supply their shops from those centres, because it would be so much cheaper. The railway from London to Liverpool for dead meat is £2 per ton, while from Liverpool to London it is 13s. 4d. It will be remembered that Argentine meat goes to Liverpool. That difference in railage is equal to 9d. per head on lamb and 1s. 1d. per head for mutton going from London to Liverpool, while the Argentine people can rail their stuff from Liverpool to London at one-third of the cost. Now, how can we compete against the Argentine people if we have to pay that difference in railage, while we also have the chance of our stuff being damaged by the long railway journey? Again, I maintain that there is a better price in the provincial districts of Great Britain than in London. This is an extract from a letter sent by the London agents of the Canterbury Farmers' Association, dealing with the frozen-meat question: "*Combination.*—There is, I am confident, no doubt that a combination could be made among sellers here, provided the shipments to salesmen on Smithfield were discontinued. This fact prevents any possibility at present of a combination to regulate prices. A combination among selling agents here would not be in the nature of a monopoly, because the object would not be to put prices up to a high level, but would be to regulate the price so as to avoid the very excessive and violent fluctuations that we have seen from time to time in the meat-market here. If selling agents once had control of the meat shipped from New Zealand they could meet, say, weekly, and fix the prices of the various grades, under which no member would sell. At the present time on a dull market, to sell, agents are continually under-selling each other in order to make progress with sales, and the salesmen on Smithfield (the buyers) naturally pit one agent against another to break down their prices. This competition is greatly aggravated by the salesmen on Smithfield, who have large consignments direct from New Zealand, going round and quoting meat often at lower prices than agents, thus completely upsetting the market. Salesmen do not always deal with their consignments themselves—that is, sell direct to the retail trade off their stalls. They go about selling in larger lots—100, 200, 300, or more—to other smaller salesmen in the market, who in turn dispose of it to the retail butchers. Probably the greater part of the meat that the salesmen sell on their own stalls is their own property, and it is their consignments that they sell in the larger lots to other salesmen. It passes my comprehension how the shipper in New Zealand can imagine that a salesman can handle his meat to better advantage than a selling-agent independent of Smithfield. The first step to forming a combination here is to get the freezing companies to stipulate that all meat frozen by them must be consigned or handed to an agent in London independent of Smithfield. When that is done a combination could be made here. *Store.*—One proposal was made that there should be a large store run by various colonial Governments to handle all colonial produce. There are, I think, too many interests to overcome to enable this to be a success; as, after all, colonial produce is not all that comes to this market, and it is better to have one market for each kind of produce. I do think, however, that New Zealand could run a store of their own with very great advantage for frozen meat. The charges here are outrageous, and the ring is so secure that no concessions can be got. Such a store could be fitted up for £50,000 or £100,000, and charges for storing could