

79. Did it not occur to you to ascertain what the retail prices in the colony are?—I say that I did ask a month ago.

80. The Premier has stated publicly that the retail prices in New Zealand were considerably higher than in England, despite the heavy cost of freight and other expenses of taking the mutton to London. Would you say that that is correct?—I cannot say what is going on in the colony. I told you what I understood was the Wellington price—that I heard that the price of legs was 5½d.

81. I wish to get your answer as to whether such a statement as that reported as having been made by the Premier is correct, taking the Wellington prices?—I do not know what statement was made. I think it is hardly fair to ask me whether a statement made by the Premier is correct or not.

82. You are not called upon to discuss that. You are simply asked the question, if the Premier or any one else were to make a statement that retail prices in New Zealand were considerably higher than they are in London, would that be correct?—I should say it was incorrect.

83. That is all I want to know?—I wish to say I was speaking generally of New Zealand meat. There is meat sold at a much lower price.

84. *Mr. Rutherford.*] You have kept a shop yourself?—Yes.

85. And you speak with some authority?—Yes.

86. How long do you propose to keep these shops open?—It depends on circumstances. I could not say offhand how long.

87. I see you have made provision for three years—you think it might be necessary to keep them open that long?—I think it will be necessary to keep them open for some time as an advertisement.

88. Have you reason to believe that the best brands of New Zealand mutton are frequently sold as English?—Yes; that is generally understood.

89. I suppose it is generally understood also that it enables buyers to give a higher price for it?—I do not think it affects the price of New Zealand mutton very materially, and that the depreciation caused by the fraudulent sale on the other hand minimises the benefit.

90. You told us on a previous occasion that Fletchers have a hundred shops?—Yes; they have numerous shops.

91. And I think you said they dealt entirely in frozen meat?—I believe they now deal only in frozen and chilled meat. I consider W. and R. Fletcher's a highly respectable firm.

92. Yes, that is why I am referring to them. You state in your estimate for the first year's business you expect a profit of 6½ per cent.?—Yes.

93. In the second year 14½ per cent.?—Yes.

94. And the third year 48½ per cent.?—Yes.

95. Have you any idea why Fletchers did not open shops of the character you describe: would they not make 48½ per cent.?—Yes; several of them may have. W. and R. Fletcher have shops throughout the country, and are doing a very good trade.

96. Do they not advertise New Zealand mutton?—That is the point. They do not advertise New Zealand mutton to any extent, as I desire. They make no special feature of it, except by circular, sent regularly to their customers.

97. Then, the opening of these shops would cause us to come into competition with respectable people like Fletchers, would it not?—It would to a certain extent.

98. Are you aware that in the Canterbury Province, where the best class of mutton and lamb is exported from, a number of respectable butchering firms have their buyers there competing continually with each other?—Yes.

99. Are you aware that these buyers are now giving higher prices than the growers could obtain if they shipped their stock themselves?—I did not know, but I take it as a fact.

100. *Mr. Bollard.*] In opening the shops in England your object is to increase the price to the producers here?—My object would be to keep the present high rates steady.

101. That would benefit the producer?—Yes; so that if we get the competition from the Argentine that we hear of we shall be in a better position to defeat the effect of the large quantity they may send forward.

102. That is the real object—to secure to the producer the highest prices that can be got?—Yes; that is so.

103. And in order to show that the meat came from New Zealand you would have the Royal arms stamped on it?—I am in favour of branding New Zealand meat, but it is not included in this proposal. My proposal is that the shops shall have the Government coat-of-arms on them, and a guarantee so given that the shops are opened by the Government with a view to educating the people by demonstration as to the merits of New Zealand meat.

104. In order to do that you would require to have regular supplies so that you would always have New Zealand meat on hand?—Yes.

105. Well, seeing that a very large proportion of the frozen meat sent from here goes in six months of the year, how would you propose to keep up the supply to these shops during the slack time of the year?—The Government would have to purchase the meat, just as any other retailer would have to do, during those months.

106. Unless you got regular supplies from here you could not get New Zealand meat in London?—They would get supplied as regular as any other person.

107. But other people when they cannot get New Zealand meat get River Plate meat?—Yes.

108. And you propose to sell nothing but New Zealand meat?—Certainly.

109. Suppose you cannot get supplied from New Zealand?—Of course, if you cannot get supplied there is no good talking any more about it.

110. How would you get the supply?—By regulating the shipments at this end.

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