

WEDNESDAY, 30TH SEPTEMBER, 1903.

W. NELSON (of Nelson Bros., Tomoana) examined. (No. 12.)

1. *The Chairman.*] We have asked you to come and give evidence before this Committee because we all have knowledge of the extensive operations you have carried on for many years in the frozen-meat trade. We are aware that no company which has dealt in New Zealand meat in Britain has anything like the ramifications of the C. C. and D. Company, and as this question of opening shops and dealing with frozen meat at Home may have far-reaching effects we shall be glad to have your opinion on the matter. Have you studied Mr. Cameron's scheme and the Premier's? Would you like to answer questions or to make a statement first?—I would prefer to answer questions.

2. I think we should confine our work largely to the question of distribution at Home and the schemes which have been laid before us. Have you studied Mr. Cameron's proposals?—Yes, I have.

3. Will you give us your opinion as to whether you think they are practical and are calculated to improve the condition of our meat-trade at Home?—The shop question, as Mr. Cameron puts it, strikes me as the proposal of a man who does not understand anything at all about the business, or wishes to deceive himself in regard to it. At a glance any one with the slightest business knowledge will see that the proposal, if it is the same as I have seen in print, is palpably crude and without any foundation on common-sense. I had an opportunity of hearing Mr. Cameron speak at Hastings on this question last week, and his idea was that he was going to introduce his meat through this shop agency to what we call the "upper ten"—not only to the upper class, but to the distinguished upper class. I have always held, and everybody else, I think, must hold, that our frozen meat must go to provide the millions with food, and not the "upper ten." Bearing on that, I have the report of a Select Committee set up in London and dated 1892, on the marking of foreign meat, and there I find what I think New Zealand as a whole very little realises—viz., that Home-grown meat represented (in 1892) two-thirds of the whole consumption of Great Britain—that is to say, that the meat produced in Great Britain supplies two-thirds of the amount of meat consumed. I take it that the "upper ten" is provided for by this two-thirds of Home-grown meat, which (whatever we may think of the excellences of New Zealand meat) is better than ours. It has been grown for centuries for mutton and not for wool, whereas ours has been grown for wool and not for mutton, and it is admitted to be better than ours. The "upper ten" will be supplied with it and ours must take second place, so that when Mr. Cameron proposes to open a shop at the West End of London to supply the "upper ten" it seems to me to be a preposterous proposition. So far as the scheme is concerned, the only objection I have to it is that as taxpayers it is quite evident that we shall have to pay the loss on these shops. I look upon it as absolutely certain that these shops will lose money, and then the New Zealand taxpayer will have to make up the loss. On the face of it, if Mr. Cameron could see his way to make 48 per cent. on his capital, he would find plenty of people ready to provide the money, and I should be very glad to do so myself. At Hastings he said he would open one shop in London. Well, London has an area of sixty-four square miles, and I cannot believe that one shop in an area of sixty-four square miles would help us very materially. Of course, there are a great number of sides to this matter: there are the shop details, and he has kept absolutely clear of them. A very strong point is in connection with our lamb trade. Our lamb is sold all over the country and in large quantities; but there is a matter of detail in that. Anybody, whether he is a grocer, a chemist, or anything else, can sell lamb; all he has to do is to chop it down, quarter it, and send it away, there being no waste and no butchering skill required. Mr. Cameron appears to omit all the thousand-and-one things that butchers sell and that New Zealand does not supply. He told us in Hastings that he would get his calves and pigs and bullocks, and so on, from New Zealand, while, as a matter of fact, there is not a regular supply obtainable from New Zealand. He would have to get these things from America or elsewhere, and would lose money.

4. Regarding the distribution, it is contended that people living fifty miles north of London know very little about New Zealand meat, and that it is not placed before them in such a way as to secure their custom. What is your opinion about that?—That is an astounding assertion, and on that point alone Mr. Cameron's proposal should be discounted. He either does not know what the position is, or he does know. If he does know it he does not speak the truth, and if he does not know it he ought to know it. He made the assertion in Hastings that there were not more than a dozen shops supplied with New Zealand meat north of a line fifty miles from London, east and west. I handed this book (produced) to him to show what the C. C. and D. Company did in a single day. He opened it and looked at it, and then picked up another paper and said, "This suits me better," and it said that nobody did deliver New Zealand sheep to more than a dozen towns outside of a line fifty miles north of London. He ought to know better than that. We know that he has been engaged in the meat trade in Manchester—with what success he ought to know better than I—but if he made 48 per cent. I think he would have stopped there. This pamphlet I showed him states that there were about one hundred and fifty towns supplied by the C. C. and D. Company in one day north of the line mentioned by Mr. Cameron. Presumably a company doing that business would supply an equivalent number of towns the following day, and I might assume that certainly during a week they would supply about four hundred towns north of that line. Although the C. C. and D. Company are the largest distributors of colonial meat in England, still there are a great number of other people distributing, and no doubt in the aggregate these other houses supply double as many. Assuming that to be a fair estimate, there are from a thousand to twelve hundred towns being supplied north of this line mentioned by Mr. Cameron.

5. It has been represented that, being agents for other countries besides New Zealand, although you may have supplied a hundred and fifty towns north of the line referred to, those hundred and fifty towns may not have been supplied with New Zealand meat?—Has it been suggested what the towns were supplied with?