

30. Have you any suggestion to make that would tend to give us better prices?—No practical suggestion. Of course, one knows what is the matter, but it cannot be bettered. To get full value for our meat it must have regularity of supply; but now the sheep-farmer is the basis of all that is weak in connection with it. He insists that the freezing companies shall freeze for him as fast as they can do it, and the Meat Export Company is doubling the size of its works in consequence, and the Belfast Company is following suit. That means that he is going to get his meat to London quicker. In the South Island they used to ship with regularity, but now for months the works are idle simply because they have multiplied them, and the farmers insist upon having all their sheep frozen at once.

31. Has not the change from wethers to lambs been the principal factor in bringing about the revolution of which you speak?—One would think so; but their mutton seems to be keeping up. They are still shipping their mutton, and the excessive shipments of lamb have not, so far, reduced the quantity of mutton. Of course, their export of mutton would have been greater if so many lambs had not been killed, but it has not been reduced.

32. Would the New Zealand grower be justified in expecting a lower rate of freight now that the quantity of frozen mutton has increased so enormously as to justify the large boats now in the trade?—If the trade had been equalised I have no doubt the freight would have been lowered. You have an object-lesson in the Wellington Harbour now. There is the largest meat-ship in the world now waiting for a shipment in November—indeed, there are many ships waiting there. It is evident that if a ship cannot be loaded up in the winter time it cannot be worked as cheaply as if regularly loaded without any detention.

33. Would it not be a great advantage, and enable freights to be lowered, if the three principal shipping companies came to an arrangement by which they would not be under the necessity of running after each other from port to port, each taking a small quantity of meat? Would it not be an advantage, say, if the Tyser Line could take all the frozen meat, say, this month from Hawke's Bay, the Shipping Company from Wellington, and the Shaw-Savill Company from Lyttelton?—Theoretically it is unanswerably right, but in practice it is impossible. If all the lines were able to do that they would save a great deal of money; but each company has its trade, and delivers its outward cargo to different ports, and each one has to fight. It is just equivalent to the Meat Export Company sending its representatives to Hawke's Bay to buy sheep: Would it not be much cheaper to freeze Hawke's Bay sheep at Hastings than to rail alive to Wellington?

34. The storage rates in London have remained at the same level a good many years now. Do you not think that some reduction might be made there?—That question is answered by your first question. It is all a matter of detail. When Nelson Bros. sold their business to the C. C. and D. Company they hoped that it was such a palpably colonial institution that the whole of the colony would support it. Unfortunately they did not, but had they done so—considering the amount of trade the C. C. and D. Company could do if they had the opportunity—they would have materially reduced the cost of handling. It is just a matter of how many times a store can be emptied and filled within a year. If it could be filled and emptied often enough the cost would be considerably reduced.

35. Do you think there is any greater difference between the wholesale and retail prices of frozen mutton and between the wholesale and retail prices of English meat?—I do not think I know enough about English meat to say; but I do not think there is too much difference between the wholesale price of frozen meat and the retail price.

36. *Hon. Sir J. G. Ward.*] The object of the inquiry is to ascertain whether it is possible to bring about a condition of things that would raise or keep the price of sheep—especially in the interests of the farmers of this country—at a remunerative or fairly high level. Could that be done without the whole of the shipping people, the freezing companies, and the stores in England and Scotland coming under one control?—I answered that question in a slightly different shape a year ago, when I stated that the only way of making the best of the frozen-meat trade was by concentrating the whole thing—the freezing works, the interests in London, and the shipping. That is an ideal. It is one of those things that can only be done by wholesale concentration. Of course, London concentration by itself would be good, but it would be better if the whole thing could be concentrated, but I fear it is practically impossible to do so.

37. Then in the meantime one strong factor in keeping up the price of sheep is free competition amongst buyers in this country?—It is simply a question of supply and demand. We are talking now not necessarily of keeping mutton up to the price it is, but to do the best we can with it. There must be a time when it will not be nearly so high as it is now. Within the last few years we have had Australian mutton struck out of the calculation. Australia will come in again and have more fat sheep than ever it has had. I look forward to the time when mutton will be lower, and we must face that position. I do not know what the sheep-farmers have to complain of to-day. I have done well as a sheep-farmer myself during the last two or three years, and, I believe, so has every one else.

38. *Mr. Duthie.*] You have passed in a pamphlet here which shows that an ordinary day's transactions of the C. C. and D. Company is 757 orders for country districts. Well, I was in London three or four years ago and went through the books of the company, and have pleasure in saying that I consider this is no exceptional day, but an ordinary day's business. They were good enough to give their accountant instructions to show me everything in connection with the trade. I saw the orders from the country and the books of delivery, and can accept this as undoubtedly to my mind a fair representation of the business. It shows here that the districts set out are worked by travelling representatives of the company. It might be interesting to know the number of the staff that has been employed over the area?—I know roughly that the company have had from ten to twelve travellers constantly at work. That is apart from the resident staff.