

51. *The Chairman.*] Are you giving evidence on behalf of the whole of the flour-millers of the colony?—I have been asked to represent the flour-millers here to-day.

52. There is about 3s. 6d. required for wharfage and other expenses in addition to the £8 17s. 6d. for flour here from Canterbury?—Yes.

JAMES MCGILL, Flour-miller, of Palmerston North, examined. (No. 2.)

53. *The Chairman.*] Will you state what you desire in connection with this question?—The price of flour f.o.b. at Timaru is £8 10s., less 2½ per cent. to the baker. The freight is 7s. 6d., wharfage 2s., cartage 1s. That is £9 0s. 6d. landed in Wellington. The member for Masterton was asking for the price of wheat f.o.b. here and at Home. The only authorities we can get are the merchants, who declare that New Zealand wheat does not bring the same price as the Australian, and this is a reasonable deduction as the baker cannot get the same return from the flour. The price of wheat to-day here would work out at 2s. 9d. a bushel. I myself bought Red Chaff, Tuscan, and Pearl, and it cost 3s. 5d. all round. The price paid by me is 8d. or 9d. a bushel more than if the wheat had been shipped Home. There is no doubt about that this season.

GEORGE WILLIAM LEADLEY, Farmer, Ashburton, examined. (No. 3.)

54. *The Chairman.*] I understand you represent the Farmers' Union?—Yes.

55. We shall be glad to hear what you have to say about the proposed treaty?—Speaking as a Canterbury farmer, I am satisfied that if the proposal to admit Australian flour into New Zealand free of duty is given effect to, a very large area of wheat-growing land will have to be devoted to other uses. That is as far as Canterbury and North Otago are concerned. When you speak of wheat-growing you practically speak of Canterbury and the district north of Palmerston South, including, of course, Oamaru. Of a total area of 258,000 acres of wheat grown in New Zealand last year, 240,000 acres were grown in Canterbury and Otago, with the addition of a few acres in the south. That means that if the proposal to admit Australian flour duty-free is given effect to, a very large area of this land will have to go into permanent grass or other crops—as, for instance, oats, in which the Southland farmers can compete with us owing to the climate being suited to their growth, and barley, for which the lands of Marlborough are so well suited. The three districts mentioned are specially adapted for these grains—Marlborough for barley, Canterbury for wheat, and Southland for oats, and if we in Canterbury have to grow more barley or oats than we usually grow, it will only injure these other people by depriving them of their market. It may be said that the wheat-area of Canterbury and North Otago will be occupied for the purpose of growing fat lambs. Well, to some extent, that is true, but not wholly so. The land is better fitted for growing wheat—that is, the heavier class of land—and in some seasons, particularly in moist seasons, we find in practice that lambs do not fatten readily on this class of land. I have land from which it is no unusual thing to reap from 50 to 60 bushels of wheat per acre. I did that this year, but in a wet season I cannot run ewes and lambs on it with advantage. I can run dry sheep on it, but not lambs. We have to wean the lambs, and fatten them on rape to get them away. Any land that costs £15 an acre will not pay to put permanently under grass unless for dairying purposes, and in our district the great difficulty is that people will not milk cows. We just keep a few cows for our own use, but dairying as an industry is practically non-existent in our district. There is very little demand for cattle—it is not a cattle country. In regard to the position as between us and the Australian farmer, as Mr. Evans pointed out, the farmers of Australia get their land much cheaper than we do. For some of my wheat-growing land I have paid £30 an acre. I am taxed on £21 as the unimproved value of it. In Australia they get their land very much cheaper, but I do not know anything about the prices mentioned by Mr. Evans. I have been told by men who have been there that land is very much cheaper—that is, for its first cost—over there than it is here. Then the cost of labour there is less than it is here. I pay my ploughmen £1 2s. 6d. to £1 5s. a week, and married men I pay more, and give them a cottage rent-free and other perquisites. Some time ago I had some information from Adelaide about the wages paid, and a return from the Government Bureau, which showed that numbers of men had been placed in the country at wages varying from 15s. to £1 per week. Well, we do not get our men at that price by a good deal. Then the system under which we work is more expensive. We have to plough our land twice—we never think of putting it under wheat until that is done. After the harvest and when we have taken the sheep off we skim-plough it over, and give it a couple of strokes with the harrow, and then it lies for two or three months, when it is again ploughed, harrowed, drilled, and harrowed again. We wait until the spring, when we roll it to consolidate the ground round the wheat-plants. The labour-cost of growing an acre of grain in Canterbury on the system we adopt, I should say, is pretty near four times that in South Australia. There they have the Sunshine Harvester referred to by Mr. Evans. That machine in one operation strips, threshes, winnows, and bags the grain ready for railage or export, and the capacity of the machine is 25 acres a day, with two men and four or five horses. When we come to Canterbury the cost of reaping, labour, twine, stooking, carting to the stack, stacking, and threshing is £1 per acre. The cost of harvesting a 30-bushel crop of wheat, put into bags in the paddock, is 19s. 6d. per acre. I do not know what the cost of harvesting the wheat in South Australia would be, but I should say only about 1s. 6d. My men get £3 a week on an average and their keep during harvest-time, and the cost with the Sunshine Harvester (I have had one of these strippers on my place stripping grass-seed) I should say would be about 1s. 6d. per acre. Then I must add that the cost of railing the wheat there (in Australia) is less. I am informed on fairly good authority that the cost of railing wheat over an equal distance in Australia runs out at about 30 per cent. less than it does in New Zealand. The taxes also are less. Our land-tax, Road Board rates, county rates, river-protective rates, charitable-aid rates, water-rate rates run into a lot of money in the course of a year. I believe that in Victoria the land-tax is not levied on areas