

51. Do you employ eight men all the year round?—Yes.

52. And do you employ casual labour?—Yes, I have fourteen hands on now. I have a lot of hoeing to do just now, and there is the syringing and spraying of trees to do.

53. The question of grapes coming to the colony has been raised: what grapes are imported into the colony now?—They are prohibited.

54. That is so. I merely wanted to show that the question of duty has nothing to do with that question?—No, it is on account of the phylloxera.

55. Has not phylloxera been found in the grapes here?—I believe it was, but it was stamped out.

56. Do you think the letting of grapes in would give rise to the introduction of phylloxera?—I believe it would. It would have to be very closely watched, and be the cause of great anxiety to the grape-growers in this colony as well.

57. *Mr. Hardy.*] In an ordinary season, what is the price of apples in the auction-marts of Christchurch?—Three-halfpence per pound.

58. Do you think they ever go much over 2d. in an ordinary season?—Yes; late in the season they are from 2d. to 2½d.

59. And if you take a season of plenty?—They might reach more than 2d.

60. Last season you were affected by hail?—Yes, this season.

61. Do you think it is more expensive to work a full orchard in New Zealand than in Australia?—I am sure of it. I have received information from friends here who came from Australia, and they also have brothers over there.

62. You are compelled to pay certain wages, are you not?—Yes.

63. And you say you were cited to appear before the Court and will have to pay more?—Yes.

64. Supposing you have got a reasonable price for your fruit, would you have any objection to paying good wages?—Not the slightest.

65. You do not believe in starving people?—Certainly not. I would pay 7s. a day willingly to-morrow if I could still make a profit.

66. You agree with the policy of living and letting live?—Decidedly I do.

67. *Mr. Bolland.*] Have you any idea of the areas laid down in orchards in the colony?—No.

68. Do you know that the Provincial District of Auckland has more than 50 per cent. of the total area?—I believe it has a large quantity. I know one man who has 70 acres.

69. Do you know that we should be very glad in the Auckland market to get £5 a ton for sound apples—that is, a little over ½d. a pound?—Why, then, do you not ship them to Wellington and other centres?

70. I do ship to Wellington and Dunedin. With regard to the prices at which they are sold retail, do you not think the fruit-sellers are responsible for a great deal of the extra price the ordinary public have to pay for their fruit?—We are of that opinion. We know that when they have bought our stuff for 1d. and 1½d. per pound we have seen it marked up at 3d. and 4d. a pound, and rather than sell it for less, if you go round to their back-yard you will see the fruit rotting there. That is where the mistake lies.

71. Where you can buy apples at £5 a ton, do you not think there is no occasion for importation, if the fruit-sellers would be reasonable and ask fair prices from the public?—Yes. I think the price of apples ought to be higher than what you say.

72. With regard to grapes, do you know that we can grow first-class grapes in the open and sell them at 3d. a pound in Auckland—that we have hundreds of acres of grapes?—Yes. I was up at Hastings last year, and saw “ripping” grapes at Frimley.

73. And some of these grapes fall into the hands of the fruit-seller, who charges 50 per cent. higher right away?—Yes.

74. Do you not think the fruit-sellers are better paid than the fruit-growers?—I think they are.

75. There are large quantities of grapes growing in Auckland both in the open and under glass: do you know what price the people who grow under glass get for their grapes?—They do not like to take less than 1s. a pound down our way.

76. In Auckland they would be glad to get 7d., but the moment these grapes get into the hands of the fruit-seller they are ticketed up at 1s. a pound?—That is so.

77. *The Chairman.*] Have you ever thought about establishing a fruit-market in Christchurch to which the public could go and purchase what they want?—Yes, but that requires a lot of capital.

78. Do you not think that the municipality might take up the question of establishing a market for both fruit and fish?—I do indeed.

79. You have never moved in that way among yourselves, have you?—No.

80. Mr. Hanan put a question about the freight and competition: Otago and Southland would not be affected so much as the north in the matter of apples?—I do not think so.

81. The value of fruit imported last year, including apples, pears, and plums, was £12,000 and 1,026,000 lb. in weight, these fruits being subject to the 1d. duty. That was nearly all from Australia. Under the ½d. duty the figures were 2,121,000 lb., of a value of £20,000. That also was for apples, pears, and plums. The amount of the duty at 1d. per pound was £4,270, and at ½d. per pound £4,837.

EDWARD BULL examined. (No. 8.)

82. *The Chairman.*] What is your occupation, Mr. Bull?—I am secretary and manager of the New Zealand Candle Company, Wellington, but I also speak on behalf of the other three companies, Dunedin, Auckland, and Christchurch.