

380. *Mr. Foster.*] Then, how do you account for the fact that some of these bales have been charred inside and the outside packing intact?—That would lead one to believe that there was something approaching spontaneous combustion setting up in the centre of the bale, if not actually spontaneous combustion.

381. The question of friction has been put forth, and, so far as the Commission is concerned, they think there is absolutely nothing in it?—Well, I am not a seafaring man, but one told me that, and I thought there might be something in it.

382. I can understand that, other conditions being favourable, that might be the trigger, as it were, to touch it off. You see, the bands are deeply imbedded into the bales, and the effect of the bales rubbing against the stanchions would not be likely to set up much heat?—Still, if a hardly pressed bale was continually rubbing against an iron stanchion I could conceive that, sufficient air not being able to reach it, these bales might become heated in time.

383. Would you think that, if there was sufficient heat inside to make it in a state of incandescence though not actually flaming, it might assist?—It might be, but I should not think so. I have never seen wool on fire, although I have seen it at all stages.

384. Unfortunately very few have?—I have never seen it on fire, although I have always known that it has been considered that spontaneous combustion would be set up in the centre of a bale, but have never met a wool-man who has seen it in that state. I have seen great heat in station wool of a quality which is so-called wool, and I believe a large quantity of that has been offering for sale during the past year—I cannot say though that it was shipped.

385. A larger quantity of low qualities?—I have been told that in Christchurch wool has been sent down under the designation of some fancy name—locks, pieces, or suchlike—which was so solid with vegetable matter that although the bags have incurred charges of 1s. each, yet the contents were only saleable at 1s. 6d. per bag.

386. You would not lead us to infer that anything of that class was shipped?—I think it is highly probable that some one did.

387. *The Chairman.*] Would it not consume itself in expenses?—I do not think the wool of the average farmer has been so heavily skirted this year; it would not be human nature if it were so. I think, therefore, that as little as possible has been taken off the fleece.

388. You have heard that there have been considerably more low qualities brought forward?—Yes, it has come down here—so much so, as my informant told me, that it would be a disgrace to call it wool.

389. Did they give it a name?—Yes, they had to give it a name.

390. *Captain Blackburne.*] Mr. Barcas, the manager in Wellington of the New Zealand Loan and Mercantile Agency Company, told us that in every case except one during the February and March sales of this year the weights were less than the Wellington shipping weights, and they often varied from two or three to as much as ten pounds. Has that been your experience?—I am not in a position to say anything as to that. We do not ship greasy wool. Our wool is passed through the same mechanical process whether it is a wet or good season, and is mechanically dried.

391. Have you heard other people in Christchurch having any experience of that sort—those who deal with greasy wool?—No, I cannot say that I have. I saw that that evidence was given, but I cannot recollect having had any experience of a like nature.

392. *The Chairman.*] Of course, the condition of the wool coming down in the railway-trucks does not affect you at all?—As between the works and the port it does. I think in that respect there is a possibility of considerable improvement. It is quite possible that wool may be sent away from the works in good condition and may, unfortunately, through some carelessness, either on the part of our own employees or others, get exposed to considerable wet before shipment.

393. You draw your Timaru shipments to Lyttelton?—No, never. It is all shipped there.

394. So there is no railage on it except there?—From Burnside we ship to Port Chalmers, from Oamaru we ship from there; practically all Timaru wool is shipped from Timaru. Picton wool is shipped from Picton.

395. So the longest railage is from Islington?—Yes, but about the same from Burnside.

396. Are you compelled by the Railway Department to load a certain number of bales in a truck?—I believe there is a certain standard. I know it was years ago, although I have not loaded many trucks myself.

397. We have had it in evidence that by regulation you must put so many bales in a truck, and that causes a flat top to form: Do you consider that mischievous?—I think it should be avoided if possible.

398. Do you go so far as to say it should be abolished?—I think it would be wise in view of what has taken place this year that no precautions should be neglected. But I think we should have greater supervision at the port.

399. It is an appreciable factor?—Yes. And I would have greater supervision at the port, for in many cases it is left to the dictum of the storeman, more or less irresponsible, to say whether it is fit for shipment or not.

400. Do you think it is desirable that there should be some one to whom the storeman should refer, and who should have authority to say that the wool will or will not go?—Yes. I know of a case which happened this year where wool was wet in transit, and an auctioneer who was a wool expert happened to be at Lyttelton that particular afternoon. It was not his duty to go through the sheds, but the storeman happened to mention to him that some wool got wet. "I think this is all right," he said, "and we will let it go." The auctioneer said, "There must be no doubt about it," and the storeman replied, "Oh, it is all right. Let it go." But the auctioneer was not satisfied, and asked to see it, and the result was that that wool was stopped, for it was not fit for shipment.

401. You think that should be the universal system?—I think there should be some one in authority whose dictum would be accepted without question.