

your Department subsequently took action. It was then, for the first time, that we were advised that the butter complained of was a small lot branded "No. 109." This lot of butter had no other brand on it to connect it with our business. Had information been given to us in December that it was the "No. 109" which was suspected, as I think it should have been, that brand would naturally have been more carefully watched by us. I am personally more interested than your Department is in avoiding sending anything to England which is likely to do our business harm, and I take it as an unfriendly thing that your Department, either by its Graders or anybody else, withheld information which it might easily have given, and which might have prevented risks occurring. To me it appears as if the information was withheld for the purpose of preventing me from investigating, and, if need be, withdrawing the butter from shipment. The butter in question was in the Grader's hands on the 13th February. I received information of its alleged defects on the 25th, twelve days afterwards. Mr. Cuddie's letter was dated 23rd. If reasonably prompt intimation had been given we could at once have withdrawn the suspected boxes from shipment. This would have been easier for us than having, upon the belated information of the suspicions of your Department, to instruct our English agents to withdraw them from sale on reaching England. Mr. Cuddie's explanation, which is doubtless the real one, is that he was absent from his office; although I do not recognise that as a sufficient reason why the alleged defect was not intimated to me by some one as soon as it was suspected. We received the Commissioner's suggestion that we should ourselves take samples for independent analysis when the butter was actually on its way to England.

It remains for me to say that your Commissioner, Mr. Cuddie, was informed of all the facts as here set forth in a personal interview which I had with him; and to add that my company, the pioneer of the industry, has so manifestly sought to safeguard the industry's interests in every particular that, had the charge referred to actually been true, it related to such an unquestionably accidental incident, and to such a small quantity (one box of a season's make of nearly eighty thousand boxes), that a prosecution based upon it must appear to any one as at least unwise and recklessly unfair. It is possible that a mischance might occur in any business—our own or any other company's—so as to create a technical breach of the law. I understand that doctors, lawyers, editors, and all sorts of wise people are not exempted from this risk.

My company's operations extend over, roughly, a hundred miles by fifty miles of country. I have sixty separate stations to control within that area, and I have to look after 175 persons whom we employ. If you will call to memory your own experience in trying to keep errors from creeping in, even where the whole of the business in hand may be directly under your own sight, you will understand that, situated as I am, I look for possible mishaps to take place. A purely accidental mishap I can overlook; but if I have reason to know that a fault is due either to intentional wickedness or serious carelessness, I am not in the habit of accepting excuses. I commend this attitude for your Department's consideration.

I should further like to make strong representations that, where your officers have reason to suspect excessive moisture in butter prepared for export, such butter should be set aside by them, and the owner advised, so that he may at least have an opportunity of withdrawing it. Indeed, I should approve of exportation being prohibited.

In closing, I call your attention to the harassing influence of your Department's action, and the great waste of time for which it has been responsible. Apart from injury to our brand and our business, which I do not now attempt to assess, the value of the time and other expenditure of my company which has been directly involved has been at least £200. I should be glad if in some manner you could see your way to compensate us for this waste which has been caused by your Department.

Yours, &c.,

WESLEY SPRAGG,  
Managing Director.

The Minister of Agriculture, Wellington.

SIR,—

Auckland, N.Z., 24th March, 1897.

Your letter of the 27th February, which covered a copy of your Wellington Grader's report upon shipment of butter per "Rotomahana," reached me in due course. The delay in replying thereto, for which I apologize, is due to my having waited for information upon the subject.

I am sorry to have come to the conclusion that your officer has failed to give our interests, and through us the interests of dairying in the Auckland District generally, the protection and assistance which may reasonably have been expected from your branch of the Government service. A perusal of the report suggests that your Grader's conclusions were arrived at upon less information than the importance of the case warranted. Indeed, were not such a suggestion altogether inadmissible, I should fear that both it and the irrelevant strictures of your letter, together with the needless waste for which your Department is responsible, were the result of an intention most unfriendly to my association's business and to the dairying industry of the Auckland District. The opinion which you express that it will be necessary for your Department to "consider whether the present freezing facilities provided for Auckland can be continued" is unfortunate in being connected with your present treatment of Auckland interests.

I may premise that space was actually booked upon the "Takapuna," by which we have hitherto sent our butter; but, owing to the overlapping of engagements by the Union Steamship Company, I was induced to accept space in the "Rotomahana." To have insisted upon the butter in question going by the "Takapuna" would have been to have shut out some of our Taranaki neighbours, who, equally with ourselves, had suffered from lack of Home-freight space, and were