

pany have a special cover at a rate considerably lower than the other shippers, the favour in this respect conferred being because the company is a businesslike institution, which has means to protect its produce against unnecessary damage, and also against "faked claims" for imaginary damage on a falling market. The favour is also perhaps partly due to the fact that this company carries half its own risk, and by so doing inspires a certain amount of confidence in the insurers that reasonable precautions will be taken against damage being sustained. The very nature of the insurance business necessitates the rate of premium being fixed in accordance with the losses sustained in previous years, and there is also a necessity on the part of the insurance companies of incurring as little unpopularity as possible in disputing claims and requiring conclusive proof of the amount of damage that has been sustained. The nature of the produce as the subject-matter of the insurance also presents grave difficulties in resisting claims for damage, as the question as to whether such claims should be allowed or not must to a very great extent depend on the opinion of men skilled in the trade, and who act as experts in estimating the amount of damage which has really been sustained. The old method, on the occasion of a claim being made for damage to meat against the insurance company, was that surveyors should be appointed respectively by the persons making the claim, who were generally the buyers, and the insurance companies, and it was very often the case that a surveyor employed by one party one week would be in the service of the opposite party in another week—a method which is hardly conducive to impartial and honest adjustment of the claims. For the future the insurers now stipulate that they will only pay the expenses of their own surveyor; so, unless the shipper likes to take the insurance surveyor's award without employing anybody on his own account, he will, in addition to the premiums mentioned, have to bear the expense of paying a surveyor on his own behalf, the estimated increased cost to shipper being £10,500. From the above it will be seen that the farmers consigning their meat for sale in London have more often than not an insurance effected for them about which they know nothing, except, perhaps, that they see an amount deducted as the insurance premium in their account sales, and the ordinary farmer does not trouble himself much about the rate of this premium, nor does he ask the reason why it should be so high. Isolated, and to a certain extent apathetic, he does not trouble himself about the matter, and allows himself to be imposed on because individually it is not worth his while to resist the rates charged. It is in the hope that we may rouse and inspire the farmers—the men who work on the land that the rest of us may be well nourished—so that they may arise and use the powerful levers of co-operation for the purpose of removing some of the glaring defects that exist in the trade, and insure the adoption of methods which confer some reasonable protection on shippers at a moderate expense, that this remit has been sent forward. What my association considers desirable is to bring directly before the farmers the fact that the conditions under which their meat is dealt with at the other end of the world are so rotten, vicious, and antiquated that they have to pay nearly double the amount in premiums in insuring their produce which they would otherwise have to pay. If this is petty tinkering with the channels of communication, then let those who think so by all means continue to submit to the old methods; but if the farmers as a class will support the motion, and if they will assist financially if necessary, there is no reason why the present devices and tricks should not be exposed and removed, and a policy against all damage at a reasonable rate made available for the shippers. In dealing with existing defects it is perhaps desirable that the method of loading the meat in New Zealand should be made a matter of inspection by some recognized authorities, as the present method, in which there is an entire absence of such inspection of the ships' holds in which the meat is carried, after such holds have been used for all sorts of cargo on the outward voyage, is hardly conducive to a satisfactory condition under which the meat is carried Home. In addition to this, it might also perhaps be desirable that a careful and efficient supervision of the discharging of the meat from the railway-trucks or stores into the ships should be made compulsory. Improved covers, also, protect meat, and therefore by all means they should be adopted. These defects are, however, trifling compared with the conditions under which meat is discharged and put into stores in London; and so far as can be gathered from informal reports which reach us here, it is a mere chance whether reasonable precautions are adopted when the meat is taken from the ship and placed in store, and more often than not it is then exposed to conditions, such as carriage through London in open lorries and carriage up the Thames in lighters without any insulated storing-chambers, which must inevitably have a prejudicial effect on the meat, and create damage in respect of which a claim is generally made on the insurance companies. With regard to methods which might be adopted for the purpose of insuring more reasonable precautions against damage, it would perhaps be more appropriate that this should be referred to the committee of inquiry which has been set up to deal generally with the matter, and for the present it should suffice if I merely suggest that the whole question of insurance of the farmers' meat should be intrusted to an association of meat-producers, which should arrange for an inspection here of the ships' holds and supervision of the loading of the meat, and that on the arrival of the meat in London its discharge from the steamers and carriage to the cold-store should also be a matter of inspection. If this were done there would probably be no serious difficulty in the association taking out a general cover with Lloyd's, and giving the shippers the benefit of that cover and of all discounts allowed in connection with it, and at the same time charging them with the expenses of such supervision and inspection in the form of a small fee charged on every hundred carcasses shipped. There does not appear to be any reason why such an arrangement should interfere with the business of agents here and in London who have meat intrusted to them for sale, and, even if it does to some extent raise the agents' charges by the payment of an additional fee, the farmers' contention is that, whether he is subject to advances from such agents or not, the rate of insurance premium he is now asked to pay is exorbitant and excessive, and he is clearly entitled to insist that, as he eventually pays the premium, he is the man who should have an opportunity of saying whether or not anything should be done to bring about a reduction in insurance rates.