

being no spare one, we had to take all the sheep out of the vessel and sell them for what they would fetch. After a delay of a couple of weeks we got a new shaft made and started afresh, finally sending her off from Port Chalmers on the 15th of February, 1882, with a cargo of 4,311 sheep and 598 lambs. The average weight was 80lb. for the sheep, and 40½lb. for the lambs, and we realised about 6½d. a pound for the mutton in London, which is a better price than we have ever got since. Very considerable risk was experienced during the voyage, as the air-trunks got choked, and but for the ingenuity and capability of Captain Whitson the cargo would have been lost, and meat-freezing in New Zealand might have been delayed for several years; but he overcame the difficulties, and landed his cargo in first-class order. When the sheep were put on the London market the *Times* had a special article on them, and stated that it was “a prodigious fact;” and no doubt the New Zealand mutton has turned out a prodigious fact to the English farmer. The New Zealand Government of the day gave us £500 as a bonus for the first shipment of meat, which was a very small recognition of the service done to the colony; but we were satisfied with the result which has followed. I may just mention that we chartered the “Dunedin” for ten consecutive voyages; that she always landed her cargo in good order, and died in harness, having been lost on her last voyage three years ago, not a trace of her having ever been discovered. Shortly after this first shipment was made the New Zealand Shipping Company fitted up the barque “Mataura,” loading her in Auckland, but her shipment did not turn out so well as that of the “Dunedin.”

Following closely on these shipments, freezing-works were erected at Dunedin; and steamers fitted up with dry-air machines by various makers came to the colony and carried the meat Home for us. The machines which have been most successful are the Bell-Coleman and the Haslam. The Haslam bought up the Bell-Coleman some time ago, and, although several other makers have their machines in some of the steamers, none of them do better than, and few as well as, that maker.

The Shaw, Savill, and Albion Company and the New Zealand Shipping Company had foresight enough to see that there was a “big thing” in the frozen-mutton business, and at once began to build steamers and fit them up with refrigerating machinery, at first cautiously, only carrying from 10,000 to 20,000 in one bottom, till now they have steamers carrying 50,000 to 70,000 carcasses. Then a new line came into the trade called the “Shire line,” and still another called the “Tyser;” so that we have good competition, and altogether a carrying-capacity of between two and a half and three millions per annum. In direct shipping alone the frozen-meat trade has done immense good to New Zealand. Before the freezing trade started the most of our shipping was done by sailing-vessels, and now the great bulk, with the exception of grain, is done by steamers. We get our wool Home in half the time; and but for the many direct steamers we could not have brought our dairying industry to the successful position which it now occupies. Instead of getting goods that are required in a hurry, such as the latest fashions in soft goods, by way of Melbourne, they now come direct at much less cost; and a lady can get the “latest thing” in hats much cheaper now than before this new era set in; so that the country has to thank the frozen-mutton business for many things besides the benefit it has done the sheep-farmer.

The New Zealand Refrigerating Company's works at Dunedin were the first in operation, but they were closely followed by works at Christchurch, Wellington, Napier, Auckland, Timaru, Oamaru, and Invercargill, and now more recently at various other centres, until there are some eighteen different works in the colony. The business has increased enormously. It only started in 1882 in a small way, but by leaps and bounds we are now exporting two million carcasses of sheep and lambs per annum, with a total stock of about eighteen millions; and I do not see why we should not go on increasing, not in the same proportion, but in a steady manner. Notwithstanding all this export going on, our sheep-stock has increased by a million and three-quarters during the past year, and I am pleased to say that in the South Island we have the biggest lambing that we have ever had, and the prospect for sheep-farmers, so far as increase and wool-clip is concerned, is very good. I wish we could say the same for prices of wool. When freezing was first introduced there was a great diversity of opinion as to the number of sheep which would be available for exportation, and I must say that I for one never anticipated anything like what has resulted; but it only shows what the resources of the colony are. There has been a slight reduction in the numbers exported this last year, but that can be accounted for by the dry seasons we have had. If farmers—in the North Island especially—would only pay more attention to providing proper winter food for their hoggets they would find that they would have many more sheep to shear and export than they have at present.

The trade has had its vicissitudes, like other new industries, and some of our shipments have given very small returns—a friend of mine told me not long ago that a shipment of good merino wethers which he sent Home only netted him 6d. a head on the station; and we have had several instances of good cross-bred wethers only returning 2s. 6d. to 5s., but those are rare occurrences, and on the whole the results have been very satisfactory.

Nelson Brothers, of London and Hawke's Bay, are in the trade more largely than any other firm, and have been severely criticized as trying to establish a monopoly; but some three years ago they offered to enter into contracts to buy sheep at 2d. per pound for the carcase unfrozen, sellers retaining skin and fat, which at once established a value, and many farmers took advantage of the offer, very much to their benefit. Nelson Brothers have now the largest frozen-meat stores in London, and can hold over 300,000 carcasses at a time, and, although they deal in mutton and beef direct on their own account, I consider they have done much good to the frozen-meat trade in New Zealand.

The trade being an entirely new one, much has had to be learnt, and many battles fought as to prices for freezing, railway carriage, charges in London, and particularly freights. With the other costs we had to pay, and with the low prices we were getting at Home, it looked at one time as if the trade was to prove a failure, but by constant pressure we got the shipping companies to reduce their freights by steamers from 2d. per pound and 10 per cent. primage to 1d. per pound and primage,