

EXHIBIT B.

PRIMAGE.

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TO THE EDITOR.

SIR,—Your subleader of yesterday is a forcible illustration of the old aphorisms, "Save me from my friends," and "Oh, that mine enemy would write a book." You have not written a "book," but have managed in a short article to most completely "give away" the cause you espouse. The article is evidently "inspired," but by some one with more valour than discretion. Having an intimate knowledge of the whole question, I feel that I shall be doing a public service by taking the "facts" (?) as you put them, giving the real facts for comparison. In doing this I will adopt your own figures as the starting-point. Let me, however, premise my remarks by disclaiming any intention to bring charges of "swindling" or dishonesty against any one. Customs have grown up, which are based on an old condition of things no longer existing, and those who have found these practices highly profitable to them are naturally surprised that they who have to "pay the piper" take a different view. In "the good old times" Robin Hood, Dick Turpin, and others, no doubt actuated by the highest motives, being, in fact, the antetypes of the modern socialists, proceeded to redress the inequalities of fortune by taking from the rich and giving to the poor. Unfortunately for them, the rich objected to their very summary proceedings, and took very efficient steps to stop them. Doubtless the "gentlemen of the road" then, as now, thought this a bit of monstrous injustice, and probably convinced themselves that custom had given them a vested right in their "pickings" which none but the most mean and ill-conditioned people could seek to deprive them of. Let us respect their memories as great reformers in their day, and in a similar way we can feel the deepest admiration and respect for the agents who have acquired large vested interests in "pickings," but, on the whole, prefer not any longer to be picked, however good the motives of the pickers may be.

It is somewhat difficult to give exact figures in such a case as this, as it is obviously open to each agent to say, "I don't take my 'pickings' in that way," which may be true, but we may be quite sure that he gets them all the same, though it may be done with somewhat greater ingenuity. The following table will show clearly what these "pickings" amount to, on the lowest, medium, and highest scales, these scales being used according to circumstances, such as the conscience of the agent, the degree of ignorance of the shipper, &c. That even the very highest has been quite recently applied is beyond question, though I am far from saying that this extreme case has been very general. Compare even the lowest scale on the table with your "munificent sum of 7s. 3d." as the charges on seven bales of wool, and the result is so startling that the introduction of even the most drastic legislation to stop such practices is more than justified.

Table showing the Various Charges on Wool on Different Scales.

Take the case quoted, freight amounting to £7 4s. 6d., this would mean seven bales of fair average weight, shipped by steamer to London at the rate of 1½d. per pound and 10 per cent. primage. Five per cent. of this is returned to all agents who provide cargo, and it is understood that where such agent is also appointed as general agent for the ship his remuneration is the whole of the 10-per-cent. primage.

Charges on Seven Bales.

	Lowest Scale.	Medium.	Highest.
	s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.
Primage, at 5 per cent. on freight	7 3	0 7 3.	...
Primage, at 10 per cent. on freight	...	...	0 14 6
Bill of lading	2 6	0 2 6	0 5 0
1 per cent. return London Commission, on gross value of £90 ...	...	0 18 0	0 18 0
10 per cent. on insurance premium, refunded to agent, say ...	2 0	0 2 0	0 2 0
Profit on London exchanges, at a minimum	2 6	0 2 6	0 2 6
Special allowance, extorted from the ships in some cases, by black-mailing process, of 2s. 6d. per bale	...	...	0 17 6
Total of all charges	14 3	1 12 3	2 19 6
This amounts to, per bale (omitting fractions) ...	2 0	0 7 4	0 8 6

(Imagine the profit made if an agent shipped, say, 25,000 bales, and charged on the highest scale! No wonder that large fortunes have been made.) These are very startling figures, but are correct. It will be noticed that the lowest rate is within a fraction of double that which you give as "the munificent sum," &c. The hardness of such charges on the producers is made more