

South Africa before payment has been required. I feel bound to say that in this and other respects the War Office have always shown a disposition to meet the wishes of the Government as expressed through myself, but it must be remembered that the War Office, like our own Departments, are subject to the control of the Imperial Audit and Treasury, and are not therefore entirely free to act. And here, too, I may advert to the fact that the War Office have been to a great extent dependent on the military authorities in South Africa as to the quantities of stores required and the time at which it is necessary that they should arrive, so that it often happens that requisitions for stores are received requiring such prompt despatch that the only course open was to at once place orders with the large wholesale houses who were able to ship what was required with the least delay.

I should like to add that I have not contented myself in endeavouring to transact business by letter, or even through officers sent to have interviews with the officials of the Imperial Government. I have personally seen authorities and officials here whenever there seemed any slightest ground for hoping that a personal interview would be of use. I have also never hesitated to consult private persons whose advice, knowledge, or aid might be of service, and I have made full use of the newspapers.

And here, I think, I may take the opportunity of expressing my sense of the invariable courtesy with which I, as well as Mr. Kennaway and Mr. Cameron, have always been met in our interviews with the Director of Army Contracts and other officers of the War Department.

Cheese.

Early in 1901 I obtained from you offers to supply New Zealand cheese, and I endeavoured to procure an open order of that produce, but the War Office required samples before giving any order. I accordingly purchased in the London market parcels of New Zealand cheese fairly representing the quality obtainable from the colony, and submitted them to the War Office, with the result that a trial consignment of 5 tons was authorised, and this shipment was made by the s.s. "Indramayo" in June of last year. I continued to communicate with the War Office with reference to their ordering further supplies until I secured an order for 10 tons, and later on a further order for 15 tons. I trust, therefore, that now that the New Zealand cheese has been tried and found satisfactory the War Office will continue to obtain supplies of it for South Africa and other places.

Butter.

As regards other dairy-produce, I purchased a case of New Zealand butter and submitted it to the War Office, but it has not, so far as I am aware, led to any business.

Frozen Meat.

I have not failed from time to time to call the attention of the Imperial authorities to the superior quality of New Zealand meat.

As you are aware, the supply of meat for the Imperial Forces in South Africa was during the greater period of the war monopolized by a company that had cold-storage available for the receipt and distribution of the meat in that country, and who were at liberty to procure their supplies from any part of the world. When tenders were invited in November last for a new contract the time given was so short that it was almost impossible for New Zealand to compete. I communicated with the War Office respecting the matter, and was informed that the arrangements were under the control of the Director of Supplies in South Africa, and I informed you accordingly, and that cable offers would be entertained. You will remember that the contract was let to Messrs. Bergl, and on inquiry at the War Office I was informed that no stipulation had been made as to the source from which the meat was to be obtained. I thereupon had an interview with the Under-Secretary of State for War, and urged upon him to endeavour to make it a condition that New Zealand should have a fair share in supplying meat under the contract, and I furnished him with a memorandum showing the points of the case for New Zealand meat, which he undertook should be brought under the special notice of the Director of Army Supplies in South Africa, who was then in this country. Subsequently a statement was made in the House of Commons that an undertaking in writing had been given by the contractors to obtain the meat, so far as possible, from New Zealand and Australia in preference to the Argentine. As the price under the new contract was ample to meet the cost of meat of the best quality, the superiority of New Zealand meat should give it the advantage over meat from other countries, provided the War Office insists on its right to have the best quality supplied.

A deputation consisting of the Agents-General for the Australian States and myself waited on the Under-Secretary of State for War, and subsequently sent in a memorandum urging that special steps should be taken in order that Australian and New Zealand meat might be supplied under the new contract, and that reports should be made by the Imperial Government Inspectors, giving the country of origin of meat landed for the use of His Majesty's Forces in South Africa. Subsequently we received a communication from the War Office stating that it had been arranged that such reports shall be furnished monthly, both as regards quality and place of origin of the meat supplied, and should these reports show a divergence from the undertaking in respect to New Zealand and Australian meat an opportunity would be given to myself and the other Agents-General to report on the actual position in regard thereto. Moreover, the War Office gave an assurance that for future contracts the fullest possible time would be given to New Zealand and Australian firms to tender for the meat required.

I also requested Major Pilcher, the New Zealand Government Agent at the Cape, to report to me from time to time such particulars as would show from what countries meat supplied under the contract was obtained. In response to this request Major Pilcher has advised me that in March of this year three steamers had arrived all loaded with Argentine meat; but later on he informed me that five steamers with meat had arrived from Australia, while two were on their way from New Zealand.