

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

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TUESDAY, 9TH SEPTEMBER, 1902.

WILLIAM NELSON, of Nelson Bros. (Limited), Tomoana, Hawke's Bay, examined. (No. 1.)

1. *The Chairman.*] You are aware that you have been communicated with with the object of asking you to attend and give evidence before this Committee on questions concerning the frozen-meat export trade, the price of meat, and other matters connected therewith on which you may think fit to give evidence. Would you care to make a statement to the Committee in reference to any improvement you think might be desirable, either in the shipping or the sale of meat, or other matters connected with it; or would you rather that your evidence be confined to answering leading questions?—I think I would rather answer questions put to me, because I might wander off into matters you would not like me to speak about.

2. *Mr. Lawry.*] It has been stated before the Committee that there is a great discrepancy between the prices of sheep in the North Island and in the South Island for freezing purposes. Is that so?—There is a difference between the prices of some Canterbury sheep and some North Island sheep. I do not know whether I can describe it as a discrepancy, because it is easily accounted for. The explanation is simple.

3. What is the explanation?—I think I would like to begin by saying that the critic—the outside man who criticizes this question of value of the North Island sheep against the South Island sheep—speaks in a rather airy way of sheep as being necessarily the same, and that all sheep are alike, whereas, as a matter of fact, they vary enormously. I think the best proof of what I mean by this can perhaps be arrived at by referring to Canterbury's own yards—that is, at Addington. In the Addington yards every week there is a difference in the price paid for sheep, and I imagine it is on account of their value. There is a difference of 5s. to 8s. and 9s. between one pen of sheep and another pen of sheep. Now, if in the Addington yards there can be all that difference, then it is quite easy to understand there is a difference between some North Island sheep and Canterbury sheep of from 5s. to 9s. I have seen them myself at Addington yards, where there is that difference between one pen of fat sheep of 5s., and a difference of up to 9s. per head—some pens selling for less than other pens. The difference between the best Canterbury sheep and our North Island sheep is entirely due to the breed, and in Hawke's Bay, the district I come from—and it applies chiefly to the whole of the North Island—our sheep have a Lincoln basis, a Lincoln sheep being admittedly a profitable sheep for wool, but a very bad sheep for mutton. In Canterbury, on the other hand, they have high-class Merino crossed with some other breed—either with Leicester or Down sheep, but without a particle of Lincoln blood in their veins. It will be absolutely impossible for us to get such sheep, because we have to get rid of the Lincoln strain. That is the difference between the Canterbury and North Island sheep. The Lincoln man in Canterbury cannot grow mutton such as the man who produces it from Merino with a Leicester or Down cross. Then, the Canterbury man takes a great deal more trouble in feeding the sheep. We have the misfortune to breed sheep, frequently feeding them badly.

4. *Mr. G. W. Russell.*] You said "misfortune"?—Yes, because it is a misfortune. We can grow a good article there, but it is a different article to the South Island sheep, and is not the best for mutton.

5. *Mr. Lawry.*] The same argument would apply to the two islands with regard to fat lambs?—We are getting nearer together very fast. Some years ago there was a vast difference between the two, but we can get a little bit nearer with the lambs because we can grow North Island lambs with a Down or Leicester father. For some reason or other the lamb carries the mark of paternity more than the sheep does; but, on the whole, Canterbury lambs are better than ours.

6. Generally speaking, is the quality more uniform in Canterbury than it is in the North Island?—I should think it is; but there is not the same difference between Canterbury and our lambs as there is between the best Canterbury sheep and our sheep.

7. *Mr. Field.*] When comparing Canterbury sheep with North Island sheep, what do you consider, speaking generally, is a fair difference in price, in point of actual value: What should be the difference in price between a North Island sheep with a Lincoln foundation and a first-class