

58. *Mr. G. W. Russell.*] Who asked you not to buy sheep? What interest was involved in it?—It was the outcome of numerous meetings of so-called farmers' unions, and other meetings which have been offshoots of it in connection with methods of dealing with meat. We were asked to stop buying. I thought the thing was chaff; but I am told that the cure is that we shall not be allowed to buy anything, and that the sheep-farmers shall put all their sheep in a great "scoop" and deal with them somehow. I am asked in the meantime not to buy; but if they do not sell their sheep I cannot buy them.

59. Do you think it is satisfactory for a man to freeze 50 lb. wethers on his own account and send them to the Old Country without knowing what is to become of those sheep?—I do not think any small man can afford to freeze on his own account. That is my private opinion. I would be willing to freeze anything on owner's account. It is not that he will not get full value at the moment, but if he happened to strike a bad market it might ruin him.

60. Do you consider the present method of marketing our meat satisfactory or unsatisfactory; and, if unsatisfactory, have you anything to suggest by way of remedy? I mean in the matter of consigning, adjusting, or grading, or in reference to markets or anything else: you have said that shiploads coming into a market cause the market to become congested, and so forth?—That is one very important factor that is being emphasized year by year, and it is a matter which is largely in the hands of the sheep-farmer, if he would take the trouble to render assistance to the trade generally; and that is, that he will insist, the moment his sheep is fat, on the freezing company taking it—he will not wait. As a sheep-farmer he is right, but from a frozen-meat-trade point of view it is essential that the meat should not be put on the market all at one time. Up to a few years ago the shipping companies were being very much harassed because they could not find tonnage enough to take the meat away, but now they have supplied the tonnage, with the result that the meat gets to the market very much quicker. Then, there are complaints in this district that there are not sufficient freezing-appliances; but supposing there are more put up, and they freeze faster, and the meat is carried faster, and gets to London faster, it will mean that in a short time the whole of the products of the colony will be in London within seven or eight months of the year, and for four months out of the twelve there will be no meat. Now, that is one of the greatest difficulties the London market suffers from.

61. A business regularity?—Yes, the loss from the high price for mutton we had about two years ago. Mutton went up to 5½d. a pound, and that did the greatest injury the trade has ever had, for this reason: because it is most commonly believed that most of our mutton is sold as English mutton. As a matter of fact the frozen-meat trade for the million—that is, the largest consumers—is entirely a distinct thing from the sale of fresh meat, and the men who sell this meat can only sell it at a price, and if the meat goes up to 5d. and 5½d. a pound, these men disappear—they are lost altogether. Our own experience was this, that we lost some hundreds of our regular clients, and we lost them at this period of high prices. These men were able to supply themselves with River Plate mutton, and, much to their astonishment, they found that River Plate meat suited them—that, for their purposes, it is equal to New Zealand—and they have never come back to us. That is simply the Colonial Consignment Company's experience, but all others who had mutton to sell had the same experience. The statistics we have had show that there are over one thousand butchers buying River Plate meat as a result of those high prices.

62. *Mr. Hornsby.*] With regard to the breed of the sheep: in this district the course pursued is that the buyers take the largest sheep whenever they go to the sheep-farmer. They simply take away the largest sheep they can lay their hands on, and yet the freezing companies always say that the farmers are breeding a small, compact sheep. Can you tell me whether that obtains in your district or not?—Undoubtedly it would.

63. That the buyers would take the biggest sheep that they can get hold of?—Yes; first.

64. Can you give this Committee any hint at all as to why it is that, while the freezing companies ask that the farmers shall produce a small, compact sheep for freezing purposes, they always take the biggest sheep they can get?—The first answer is that if the freezing company has a client it buys sheep from, this client's sheep must be taken. The buyer has to take the lot before he is finished with them, and naturally he would take all the fat sheep first. It is not a question of the biggest; it is a question of the fattest.

65. I am speaking of the largest?—Supposing it to be large and fat he would naturally take the largest first, because the largest will get larger, and he has got to take them all.

66. Do I understand you to say that in your district you look forward ultimately to buying the lot?—Certainly.

67. Then, it would be news to you if you were told that, with regard to the Wairarapa, the buyer comes along, drafts the sheep himself, and will not have anything to do with the balance of the sheep after he has had his pick. The farmer knows that he will never come back again after he has picked out the prime sheep. Does that obtain in your district: In the case I mention the farmer has to sell the balance of his sheep in any way he can?—I do not understand the condition in the case of a man not coming back.

68. He will not take the balance of the sheep. I understand you to say, in answer to Mr. Field's question, that ultimately a sheep-farmer would look forward to selling the balance of his sheep to the freezing company, even after the first draft of fat sheep was taken from his flock?—Yes.

69. As a matter of fact, does the buyer go back in Hawke's Bay?—Certainly; he goes as often as he thinks there will be any more sheep ready. If I were turned loose into a mob of sheep that I knew I would not see again, if there were sheep in that lot varying from 50 lb. to 90 lb., and if tallow was £38 a ton in London and mutton was 3d. a pound, I should then unquestionably take all the heavy sheep and boil them down—that is, if limited to a certain number; but if, on the other hand, tallow was only worth £19 a ton in London, as it was a couple of years ago, then