

34. What kind of combination is possible now if carried out on voluntary lines?—I know of no method by which it can be done, unless any man should be clever enough to draw up a scheme by which all the works in the colony would be under one management, all the sheep sent away under one management, and all the farmers worked under one management.

35. *The Chairman.*] Every farmer who exports his own?—I say all the meat in the colony, to make the best of the trade—although I look upon it as an impossibility—should be shipped under one control. So long as there are these hundreds of instances where people are working against each other, so long shall we not get the best out of the trade. I feel very strongly on the point, because there are so many propositions nowadays. There are proposals now about “pooling,” and the moment you start “pooling” you get a difference. Mr. Field mentioned yesterday the difference there was between his sheep and his neighbour’s sheep, and I made a remark which he might have thought facetious, but it was not.

36. *Mr. T. Mackenzie.*] You do not think it will ever be brought about voluntarily?—I do not. If Mr. Seddon were here and said he would take the lot, I suppose he would do it.

37. Do you remember the disastrous slump that occurred in lamb in 1897?—Yes.

38. Perhaps you will remember that that was entirely brought about by want of combination?—Yes. There is a slump at the present moment brought about by want of combination. Mutton might just as well be 1d. a pound more as not.

39. That slump of 1897 was brought about by one man who received a lot on consignment?—Yes, that is so. I feel satisfied myself that, notwithstanding all the talk of to-day, eventually the price of meat will be lower than it is now; but that fact only shows the necessity for getting all the improvement in our methods that can be obtained. If this combination existed the price of mutton would still be lower, in my opinion. It will be lower because of the outside competition. Australia will soon come into the market again, and the Argentine will be larger producers. If any efforts should be made to bring about some such arrangement it would be as well to make it as large as possible.

40. With regard to the west coast trade of Great Britain: that is, Cardiff, Manchester, Liverpool, and the Glasgow trade. As you are aware, there is no direct shipping there at all just now. The meat is landed in London, and distributed. Would you be in favour of the Government offering a subsidy to steamship companies to run their steamers up to those ports?—Well, no, I should not. The question of subsidies to steamers: I would rather your question was put in another way, if you would permit me to say it: that is, whether it is a practical suggestion to send vessels up to those ports. I do not believe in Government subsidies, speaking generally. The sending of vessels to these numerous ports I look upon as an unpractical suggestion. It is the matter of detail that makes it unworkable. In the first place it is very expensive. The sending of sheep by vessels up the coast is supposed to be a cheaper method than sending sheep by rail; but, as a matter of fact, these vessels are now so big that the expense of converting such steamers into coasters would be very heavy. I tried to get an estimate from a shipping-man, and he said he could not send a steamer to Manchester probably under £1,000. The fact that our New Zealand ships must go to London eventually on account of their general cargo is another difficulty. But a more important detail is this: that the different ports of England require different classes of mutton, and it would be almost an impossibility to send fifty thousand sheep to Cardiff and fifty thousand sheep to Manchester, or any other port, where the whole of that fifty thousand sheep would be adaptable to the requirements of that particular market. There is one market, perhaps, that takes heavy sheep of 80 lb. or 90 lb., and another port would take very small ones. London takes the best mutton it can get, so that, in fact, all sheep must go to London, as being the great sorting-shed of Great Britain. There are different weights of sheep and different qualities of sheep, and all have to be discovered, and at Cardiff, perhaps, the better class of sheep would have to go to London to be sold, to enable their full value to be realised.

41. You mean that certain classes of mutton suit certain trades, and that those trades are catered for?—Yes. The Argentine trade has had, in the past, a uniform article, and does not trouble anybody. They will have troubles later on.

42. *Mr. Field.*] Do you think, if we shipped to different ports, we should have to sort the mutton at this end?—Yes, there should be an expert at this end to sort the mutton, and he could not do it. If a butcher wants a 6 lb. leg he would not take a 12 lb. one. It is quite a common thing for us to have to sort out three cargoes at one time to get individual classes of sheep that our customers want at the moment. One of the greatest grievances against our company was that we did not take a ship and sell it straight out before tackling another. It was not fair, it was said; but we could not do it, because we could not get out the different classes of mutton required daily.

43. Supposing you had a parcel of 40 lb. to 50 lb. lamb to sell, and another parcel between 30 lb. and 40 lb., and you had these to sell in large lines, which would be bought by the buyers in preference?—The 30 lb. to 40 lb. lambs, of course. Those over 40 lb. would be often worth less by 1d. a pound. It is, comparatively, an unsaleable quality.

44. *Mr. T. Mackenzie.*] Would you characterize the sorts running from 35 lb. to 36 lb. as distinctly gilt-edged sorts?—We have now established a 36 lb. average, and the community needs to understand that when we talk about “40 lb. and over” lambs there would be 40 lb., 50 lb., and 60 lb. lambs among them—there would be really mutton among them. The 36 lb. average means 32 lb. to 40 lb. One man wants 32 lb. lambs and another man wants 40 lb. lambs; but we sell one thousand lambs of the 32 lb. class to ten of the other. In the meat trade there are always certain things happening which are contradictions to anything one might say. If the market happened to be very empty of lamb you could sell anything temporarily.

45. You are speaking of abnormal conditions?—Yes. Anything that may be said in connection with the meat trade is subject always to some illustration which may show it to be apparently wrong.