

Christchurch, I tried that myself last season, with some store lambs. They were a very indifferent lot, I will own, that was sent. I picked out the best and sent the balance down South, where I obtained 7s. 1d. per head, while the utmost I could realise here was from 3s. 6d. to 3s. 9d. The expenses were 3s. 1d. per head, and after paying that huge cost on the sheep of that class I was still better off by shipping to Christchurch, because I saved the commission in the North Island, after paying the 3s. 1d. We are told that the sheep going down South are sold to the local butchers, but if that applies to fat sheep it does certainly not apply to stores. They are fattened down there, and immediately become Canterbury lambs. We are told by the freezing companies that it is the breed and class of sheep which count for so much, but the breed is the same. Our sheep simply eat the Canterbury feed for two or three weeks, and that cannot make the difference, in my opinion. From the evidence given by the representatives of the companies at a late conference of farmers in Wellington, at which I was present, the Canterbury people seemed to be absolutely satisfied with the state of things appertaining to this end, and only were dissatisfied with the methods in vogue in the Old Country. Various things, as many of the Committee will know, were suggested at that conference, such as Government branding, sending consignments to other parts of Great Britain than London, and the general distribution of the meat in England. That brings me to suggest the only remedies I can possibly think of, which are these: Of course, the proposal that the Government should take up the freezing business is, to my mind, out of the question, for the simple reason that I think the southern portion of the North Island is in a worse position than any other part—in this respect, that there is a monopoly here, and if the Government established freezing-works in the North Island they would be immediately met with requests for similar works in other parts of the colony, and that would be far too much for them to undertake. But there is one thing that might be done. The Government might grade frozen-meat and brand it, dividing it into three classes—first, second, and third—and some system might be adopted whereby the farmer might receive a warrant as to the number and weight of each individual parcel of meat, so that he might be able to draw against it at per pound on the Government grade. I think it feasible also for Government to appoint agents in London, or in other parts of Great Britain, to whom the farmer might consign his meat, as this would inspire confidence among the small growers. We are told frequently by representatives of the meat companies that they do not want us to sell our meat and do not want to buy it, but they want us to freeze on our own account. But we cannot feel that there is any real truth in that proposition that they do not want to buy; because, if our sheep are sent down and the companies have large numbers of their own sheep waiting to be frozen, would it be good business on their part to freeze our sheep and allow their own to lie in the pens to depreciate? My opinion is that, under such circumstances, our sheep would be held over until the companies' sheep were in the cool-store. In the case of small consignments to the London market the same argument would apply, and I think it would create confidence if the Government were to appoint some one in London to whom the mutton could be consigned, and so do away with one of the grievances mentioned at the Farmers' Union meeting—viz., that there are too many consignees. The Government might assist also in arranging for shipments to such places as Cardiff, Hull, Glasgow, &c. It seems to me to be utterly absurd that all our mutton should go to the one port. I have not had much experience in the trade myself, but it seems to me absurd that the one port of London should be the place to which our mutton should go, and that then we should have to pay freight and carriage to other places from London. I come from the west of England myself, and I think there is a large opening for our frozen meat at Cardiff and the other places referred to. I think some steps might also be taken in the direction of prosecuting people in London who pirate our meat and sell it as English mutton, and so on. I say, let it be sold for what it is—namely, New Zealand meat. I do not know that I can add anything more. That is the only remedy I can suggest without going into a very much larger question, and I do not know that it is feasible.

3. Your principal cause of complaint is that you apparently have nothing but a combination of the two freezing-works in Wellington Province to do business with?—That is the position.

4. Have you no c.i.f. buyers?—None that I know of. The only two buyers I know of are from the two companies. I never heard of any other ones.

5. Apparently you believe the trade has drifted into a monopoly?—I am certain of it.

6. And the only way out of the difficulty you can think of is for the Government to appoint agents and assist the trade?—I think that might assist. Of course other people have had far more experience in the matter than I have, but it seems to me that that would create more confidence, because a lot of us feel that if we ship through a company we do not get fair treatment. I do not know that there is any ground for the complaints, but that is the feeling.

7. *Mr. Field.*] Can you tell us what the value of the by-products of sheep is, say, about the month of July?—I do not know that I could exactly tell you the value of them now.

8. What is the skin worth?—For the last lot of skins that I sent down I got 3½d. a pound—about 3s. They would be killed from the month of May to the month of July.

9. What is the whole value of the by-products—the tongue, and so on?—The fat would be worth about half a crown—somewhere about that. In the tallow they take the kidney fat out.

10. Do you think 5s. would be an extravagant value to put on the total by-products in the month of July?—It is more than that—I think confidently more than that.

11. Do you think there would be any large difference between the value of the by-products from North Island sheep and South Island sheep?—I have had no experience of South Island sheep, but I am told that South Island sheep have more internal fat.

12. It has been suggested by a witness that there is a difference of between 4s. and 5s. in the value of the North Island sheep as against the South Island sheep—that is, for freezing-sheep?—