

38. They are better for butchers' purposes?—The butchers in Hawke's Bay cannot afford to give the price for these heavy weights. They never have been able to give the prices, within 5s. or 6s. of Canterbury. It is a small place as compared with Christchurch.

39. Do you run butchers' shops?—No; we did run carts, but dropped money by it.

40. But you do sell meat?—There are a few hawkers who go round.

41. Are the markets good up there?—There are so few of them.

42. Still it is a free market?—Yes.

43. We have had it in evidence that a number of men in this part of the colony have had the experience of offering their sheep to the local companies, and, rather than accept the offer made by the companies, have shipped to Christchurch, with the result that they have netted, after paying 3s. or so for expenses, considerably more than was offered by the companies here?—Yes.

44. Can you account for that?—Yes. They have been mostly sold as stores, the lines from our district. I remember one line of 500 fat ewes and 500 wethers that were too heavy for freezers, and were sent down to Christchurch, where, I think, they brought 15s. They were offered 11s. in Hawke's Bay for them. They had been previously offered 13s. in November, but the owner declined at that time, and sent them down in December. The London price at that time was 2½d. per pound. There was a terrible drop, and these sheep were sent down to Christchurch and sold to the butchers.

45. Were they fat?—Yes; there was just this line of 1,000. Another man bought two lines last year, and he says he dropped £2,500 over them. This year he has bought some lines at 10s. 6d. They were not offered to the freezing companies.

46. Have you any suggestion to make for the improvement of the market in the Old Country, and particularly do you consider the Government could be of any assistance to the market, either by grading, undertaking shipments for farmers, or by cool-stores at Home, or by distributing the produce?—I really do not think so.

47. You do not think the middlemen's profits in the Old Country are excessive?—It is just this way, the more profits the middlemen make the better it is for us. The more competition there is the better it is for us. People talk about River Plate mutton being sold as New Zealand, but I never heard any complaints about the West-end butchers selling New Zealand mutton as prime Welsh. The butchers buy the meat on its merits, and the more the middlemen make out of it I say the more power to them, for the better it is for us. I have tried the butchering business, and I find that you require to get double what you pay for your stock to get any profit at all. The sheep that are bought at 4d. per pound you hear are sold at 7d.; well, the butchers require that profit on account of their shop-rents and bad debts. I know that our butchering business cost us £1,600, and we lost heavily by it.

48. *Mr. T. Mackenzie.*] Do you mean to say they require a margin of 3d. a pound at Home between the wholesale price and retail? Supposing a butcher buys at 4d., what do you consider would be a fair profit on a sheep?—He would require to get 2d. or 3d. to make it pay. I do not know anything about the working of the London trade: I only know that we require very big profits here.

49. You would not think that 1½d. would pay? Supposing a man buys a sheep at 4d. and gets a gross return of 5½d.: would you not think that sufficient?—No, I do not think so. It depends upon the turnover. You would find some of them would go to the wall.

50. You say "more power to them" if they sell at the West-end price: Are you aware that, although they get a big price for the meat, they only pay the New Zealand price for it?—If the butchers are making a profit out of it they will buy our meat more readily.

51. Say the market value of prime meat is 4d., do you mean to say they will give ½d. more?—Yes. But even among the prime sheep there is a difference. We get weekly notes of sales, and I have seen as much as 1d. per pound difference from the first of the line to the tail-end of the line.

52. Where is the benefit of that to New Zealand?—It brings in a fresh client for our meat if a profit is made.

53. Do you not think that if the best of our stuff is picked off the hooks and sold for something else New Zealand loses its good reputation thereby?—I do not see that at all.

54. If the best that this country produces is sold for something else are we not robbed of our reputation?—To tell you the truth I do not think people at Home care two straws about it.

55. Assuming that it affect our reputation?—The great thing is to get the reputation from the butchers at Home to start with. They have to buy the stuff and sell it to the best advantage they can.

56. Do you approve of branding the meat?—It would not be a bad idea, but I believe the butchers and the Smithfield market would not care two straws about branding. They buy on the merits of the stuff.

57. If there are meat rings more powerful than Argentine and Australia, and if our meat is sold for what it is and turns out to be good, will the inclination of the consumers not be to come back and buy that meat; whereas, if our best is sold for something else and our inferior meat is sold as New Zealand meat, will not that permanently injure the reputation of our meat?—Doubtless it would.

58. How do you sell your meat at Home?—It is consigned to our managers in London, and they watch the market. They sell to the highest bidder. They either sell c.i.f. or on the London market.

59. This is what they actually do at Home: they either sell the lot to the c.i.f. buyer to arrive, or give it to the market?—But if the market is good we sell portion c.i.f., and the rest we put on the market.

60. To whom do you make c.i.f. sales?—We sell to any one in the country.