

TUESDAY, 23RD SEPTEMBER, 1902.

J. HURSE, of the firm of Chapman and Hurse, Meat-exporters, North Canterbury, examined.
(No. 6.)

1. *The Chairman.*] You are aware of the objects of this Committee, and that you have been requested to attend and give any information within your power to enable the Committee to report as to whether any improvement can be effected either in the manipulation of the carcasses, the shipment and freight, or the distribution of the meat in England. Knowing that your connection with the trade extends over many years, we thought your advice would be valuable on these matters. Would you care to make a statement, or would you prefer to answer questions?—I would prefer to answer questions, and may enlarge on them at any particular point.

2. Have you had any experience in the purchase of stock in other provinces of the colony than Canterbury?—Yes.

3. Have you purchased stock in Wellington?—Yes, in Wellington and Hawke's Bay.

4. Do you find that on taking those sheep to Canterbury you are able to place them as freezing-sheep?—You might do so with a few, but not as a rule. I should be afraid to send a lot to freeze at the Belfast Factory. They would kill them there, but they would be classed as second quality and branded as such.

5. Would the proportion amount to more than 25 per cent. of good freezing quality as compared with prime quality Canterbury sheep?—During the time that I have been up here I have always endeavoured to get the fine-woolled sheep. The wool is more valuable on fine-woolled sheep, and as a rule they throw out more fat than the big coarse sheep do. I like to freeze the light sheep, not the heavy coarse sheep. I would not freeze heavy sheep if I could avoid it.

6. You would place the greater part of the sheep up here as butchers' sheep?—They would grade as second quality. There might be some rejected, but we should get little for those.

7. Taking the average sheep of that class and comparing the average 65 lb. Canterbury sheep, what do you consider would be their average value?—Well, in the first place, North Island sheep produce very little more than 50 per cent. of fat as compared with ours. Here we get what you call the running fat, while in Canterbury we do not. Here you would have $4\frac{1}{2}$ lb. or $4\frac{1}{4}$ lb. fat, while in Canterbury the average will throw nearly 8 lb. We get 3d. a pound for our tallow in Canterbury, which means a difference of 1s., and then I reckon there is 1s. 8d. in the skin. They give more for the pelts in the South Island than they do up here; here you have to pay for heavy truckage or driving.

8. If you had the sheep you speak of in Canterbury alongside Canterbury sheep, what would you consider the difference in value?—For butchers' sheep there would not be so great a discrepancy, but for freezing purposes I would not like to buy them there.

9. Is there any method or system you could advocate with regard to improving the distribution of our frozen meat in the Old Country, or which would favourably affect its distribution?—There is no doubt that so much meat going to London has a very bad effect upon the market. If two or three ships go into port together down goes the market, and if there is any great interval between the arrival of the ships up goes the market. If we could prevent the occasional gluts it would help the trade very considerably. If we could place the meat at different points where there is consumption for it as well as in London we could keep the London prices up and secure a better state of things altogether. Directly two or three ships arrive with sixty, seventy, or eighty thousand carcasses, as the case may be, down goes the price of mutton.

10. Are you aware whether the various firms which have charge of the River Plate meat send their managers down every morning to the market and decide upon the price of it?—Yes.

11. Do you think a similar system could be arranged with regard to New Zealand meat?—The River Plate meat is in very few hands at Home. They work together as a board would work, while our meat is in thousands of hands, with one man quoting one price while another may quote a different price. I have myself known meat at one time in the morning sold at $4\frac{1}{2}$ d. per lb. and in the afternoon or at 1 o'clock I have known it to be sold at $4\frac{1}{4}$ d. per lb.

12. Do you think it would be possible to combine those firms so as to make it one uniform price during the day?—No. I think when we commenced the freezing business we began wrong. We should have concentrated the business. If there had been an agent through whom the meat went, those freezing on their own account could have told that the meat would have to go through one firm, who would have been able to say, "We will give you an advance on your meat, but it must go to the market through us," and by that means the amounts could have been curtailed to suit the market. If a scheme of that kind had been formulated it would have been different. At present every little man can send his meat to different agents, with the result that it is "all over the shop," and it is almost impossible to concentrate the business.

13. You would consider concentration an ideal system, but think it is impracticable?—Yes. At present one man can put down the whole market if he likes.

14. *Mr. T. Mackenzie.*] You did not give us an idea of the difference in the average values between Wellington sheep and Christchurch sheep: When purchasing a line of prime sheep up here and also a line of Canterbury primes, what would be the difference in value?—There would not be the same difference in prime as there would be in coarse sheep up here.

15. What is the difference between the coarse and primes—approximately?—Of course we have to pay truckage. The difference in the meat would be something like $\frac{1}{2}$ d. per pound, and there is a difference in the fat. The difference would be about half-a-crown.

16. I understood you to say you knew of meat being sold at Smithfield in the morning at $4\frac{1}{2}$ d. and at $4\frac{1}{4}$ d. in the afternoon?—Yes.

17. Was there any particular reason for that—such as the market getting scarce?—No. Supposing a man has a small stock on hand, and he knows there are three or four ships coming