

and lambs of this class from the Nelson District. Now, gentlemen, the majority of our store sheep, some twenty to thirty thousand, are purchased by Messrs. Bisley Bros., prices, 5s. 6d. to 7s. 6d. for two-tooth wethers and maiden ewes, and 6s. for good-mouthed ewes; these sheep are driven overland *via* the Tophouse and Tarnedale to Canterbury, sold again to dealers, and retailed out again to the graziers, fattened, and placed upon the Christchurch market, and I am told on good authority realised in that market 14s. 6d. to 16s. 6d. per head. Now, sir, comparing the Christchurch prices with the Nelson prices for these fat sheep seems unsatisfactory. Allowing the Christchurch-Nelson sheep to be better topped, off, and adding the freight to Picton—9d. per head—on to the Nelson sheep, in my opinion, the prices on the almost same sheep (and probably purchased by the same company) in the two markets vary too much—that is, Nelson, with freight added, 10s. 9d., 11s. 9d., 12s. 9d.; Christchurch, 14s. 6d. to 16s. 6d.

While speaking with every respect towards the Christchurch Meat Company and feeling thankful to them for what they have already done for us, I will say the Nelson sheep-farmers are too much at their mercy—that is to say, whatever they offer us we are almost obliged to accept, no matter what the quality may be.

I will not dwell much upon the North Island sheep, but think the same trouble exists there as with us, and to cut it short will say there is more difference in the prices of the two markets (Christchurch and North Island) than there is in the quality of the sheep.

In conclusion, gentlemen, as a sheep-farmer I must thank your Committee, and also the Government, for the attention you are giving to the frozen-meat industry of this colony.

I am &c.,

G. N. HUNT.

The Chairman, Frozen Meat Industry Committee, Parliamentary Buildings, Wellington.

SIR,—

I have been asked to attend before your Committee to give evidence *re* frozen meat, but am unable to do so owing to want of time; but I write the following, which, if you think it worth while, you may add in the evidence. I do not speak as an expert, but I take rather a different view from most of those published views of North-Islanders *re* the question of North *v.* South prices.

The South has many advantages over the North, and has taken full advantage of them. The first point of advantage is the breed of sheep. Because of the fact that when the frozen-meat business was first started both the West Coast and Napier were rather isolated, and from other causes, we (speaking as a West-Coaster) could not take full advantage of the enhanced value given to fat sheep by the new trade; we could not get them to market; the result being that we continued to grow the sheep best suited to our district for growing wool. In the South the railway was an important factor in concentrating the output of the fatteners.

The basis, I take it, of the best frozen sheep has been proved to be the Merino. In the North we had no Merino country to fall back upon to draw our source of breeding-ewes from. In the South the back country provided the Merino, the higher downs provided the half-bred; and these, being bought by fatteners, were turned off to the factory, or sold in the sale-yards for some one else to freeze, and with the result that an ideal sheep for the English market was produced. Gradually the lamb trade in the South took the place of the wether and maiden-ewe trade, the basis being the same, only the maiden ewes, instead of being frozen, were bred from by those who went into the trade; and again an ideal lamb was the result. Five minutes in Smithfield Market would convince the most sceptical on this point, the short shank and leg of the Canterbury sheep showing its superiority over the North Island sheep at a glance.

While therefore the North Island was still breeding the Lincoln and Romney, those in the South Island were using the Leicester and Downs.

The next point—the system of sale—is also against the North Island breeder. In the South, the Addington yards (I speak of Canterbury as the largest exporter) sold the greater part. The disastrous result to many small farmers of shipping their own sheep (some years ago) no doubt conduced to the system of taking a market price, and leaving the rest to others. Then buyers soon sprung up, either as agents for others or on their own account; and these being good judges, and knowing exactly what they wanted, were able to differentiate between the various pens offered. If one is not so prime as the first pen, or not so suitable a weight, the price paid was not so good. Yet the owner would no doubt have to be satisfied, because he has an opportunity of seeing for himself that his pen was not so good as his neighbour's. This must have had a most important educational effect on the sellers.

In this Island all this is wanting. There being no such centre as Christchurch, the companies soon found that they had to institute a different mode of purchase. They employed buyers who purchased on the farms, and took delivery there, taking all responsibility from that moment. One owner perhaps, hearing that his neighbour got a little higher price, would be dissatisfied, not having seen the sheep together, or being able to compare their quality. The disastrous prices netted by those who shipped on their own account soon drove them to sell in preference, and the companies were forced to buy, or their works would be empty, more or less; therefore, it was impossible to differentiate between different sellers, and the same price had practically to be given to all, and the price lowered to allow for an average. The companies did not therefore in any way act as educators. They took what they wanted, and those who attempted to grow a better sheep were disappointed when they found their efforts met with no response in the way of better prices for a superior article. There was not a sufficient quantity of the improved grade to warrant the higher prices—