

91. What price did you give for those?—I am not certain without referring.

92. *The Chairman.*] Would your price be 10s. 6d. for the lambs that the southern buyer was to give 12s. for?—Probably, because we should have taken the lambs much sooner than he did, and before they got up to his standard.

93. *Sir W. R. Russell.*] You heard Mr. Martin say that there was no competition, and that the company gave practically the same price for Down sheep as for the ordinary crossbred?—Mr. Martin is in error. We have always made a distinction between the Lincoln and the ordinary crossbred. The work of the company's buyer is to judge of the weight and quality of the sheep delivered at the freezing-doors, and for every lot he buys a return is sent him showing how the sheep have turned out. If he returns bad value there is an immediate check upon him, and that is an explanation of the greater uniformity in the price in the North Island compared with what they have in the South. I do not approve of it, and we have endeavoured in various ways to get out of the difficulty, and lately we have determined to offer a price per pound, varying with the various grades. The settler can thus send in his sheep, paying all the expenses to the freezing-room door, at a price per pound on the various grades, and if he has a better class of sheep than his neighbour he gets the best price. The Canterbury people have had local sales for many years, and are better up in drafting their sheep. To illustrate the difference, last summer we got a letter from a West Coast settler stating that unless our buyer went to his place by a certain date he would draft his own lambs and send them in. He did so, and some of them were at once seen to be unfit for freezing. We drafted them, and sent up the rejects to Johnsonville, where we were offered 5s. for them. We could not let them go at that price, and telegraphed to the owner for instructions, and finally we sent them back to Palmerston North, from which place they were taken away by the owner.

94. What inducement is there for a sheep-farmer to breed a meat-sheep instead of a wool-sheep?—A great deal of inducement, so long as the present low rate for coarse crossbred wool is maintained in London. I have always bred strong-woolled Lincolns myself, with the exception of very few, because they suit my country and climate. But undoubtedly, if the present rates for wool are maintained, we must make a change in some direction. But even then we cannot hope to get the Canterbury abundance of artificial feed to push our sheep forward at a very early age.

95. Supposing I say that I would like to sell in the yards: I do not want a price to be fixed by a grading test, but to sell in the yards: Is there any means of allowing the meat-grower to get a better price?—I know of no means unless he takes advantage of the open door to London at rates of charges as low as are current anywhere. We were told, for instance, that the South Australian Government offered a great advantage to the farmers there, but I find on examination that the rate charged by the South Australian Government in some cases was 1s. 7d. per sheep higher than it is here.

96. At the present time your company is willing to freeze for anybody at the lowest current rates?—We advertise the fact in fifteen country newspapers, and have done so for years. We have used every effort to get relieved of the speculative risk we have to face in buying such a large number of stock. The Meat-export Company was started not to buy sheep, but to freeze on owners' account; but we have had to buy because the farmers would not face the risk themselves.

97. *Mr. Haselden.*] Did you say that none of our North Island sheep that go down South are frozen and sent Home?—I believe that scarcely without any exception all the North Island sheep that have gone down South have gone into the hands of the butchers.

98. Can you account for this: that store sheep have fetched a much higher price down there than up here, and it has paid a man to send them South after he has paid about 3s. 6d. for expenses?—In the case of store ewes Canterbury has had to ransack North and South to get them. They had to cut down their stock by four hundred thousand through the dry weather several years ago, and have had to buy a great many elsewhere since.

99. Supposing that a farmer freezes his sheep with your company, how are those sheep handled: would they be sold separately, or would you hold them over until you had disposed of your own?—The company's sheep are very seldom placed in the Smithfield Market. They are usually sold in large lots. On the other hand, in the case of settlers' consignments, they are put into the hands of one of the salesmen and sold in the same way as my own sheep.

100. *Mr. Hornsby.*] The average weight of the sheep frozen by the Meat-export Company is something over 56 lb?—56·5 lb.

101. If that is so, what becomes of the heavy sheep?—They go into that average, except those which are cut up and the legs are frozen. The rest are boiled down.

102. Why do the company's buyers always take the heaviest sheep, no matter how often they visit a settler's place, in preference to the light weights?—The reason is that as soon as the big-framed sheep is in good condition for freezing, the quicker they take him the better, because if he stands for another month he becomes so heavy that he has to be put into the boiling-down pot.

103. You said 2s. 6d. was the difference between a North Island and South Island sheep, *plus* the driving and railing?—I gave that as the outcome of average prices given by Weddell's circular.

104. Can you tell us why, seeing that there is only an apparent difference of 2s. 6d. in value between North Island and South Island sheep, taking the whole of the prices, as sorted out to this colony—why there is a difference in value of the carcase which sometimes amounts to 5s. and 6s.?—I have pointed out the very large number of rejections, amounting to 19½ per cent.; I have also pointed out that there is 1s. to be paid for railage; and I have also pointed out that there is, according to the time of the year, a difference of from 2s. down to nothing on account of the wool. There you have the difference in value accounted for at once.

105. You shipped Home last year, 1901, a lot of sheep, and you say that, taking the price you would have received from the company and the price you realised at Home, you lost £900?—£1,200 including insurance.