

283. That was the highest figure he could obtain from Nelson Bros.?—I do not know that it was Nelson Bros.

284. And he got over 16s. for those same sheep?—Yes.

285. *Mr. Field.*] Are you a sheep-farmer?—Yes.

286. Have you shipped sheep to the South?—Yes.

287. You have dealt with the matter of combination?—Yes.

288. And with competition?—Yes; there is no competition.

GEORGE EDWIN FIELD, Sheep-farmer, President of the Provincial Executive of Belgrove, Nelson, examined. (No. 16.)

289. *The Chairman.*] Would you care to make a statement or be examined on the various points connected with this inquiry?—I have heard the evidence of Mr. Buchanan (the last witness), and the evidence I can tender is totally different to what you might call Mr. Buchanan's grievances. I have only a few short notes here, but I can give you some idea of the frozen-meat trade in its bearings on Nelson. Some three years ago we made strong attempts—I was one of the movers—to start local freezing-works in Nelson, which was brought about by the very depressed state of the sheep-market in Nelson. I admit that we are very much isolated there as compared with most parts of the colony. Our sheep were very low in price indeed, and the local market could not absorb anything like the production. Three years ago our fat sheep were not worth more than 6s. to 8s.; our sheep off the turnips very rarely got more than 12s. right in the middle of the season. Sometimes we had buyers from the Coast, and prices might have got up to 14s. Our local attempt, however, failed, because our farmers did not care to carry it through. We were rather weak in finance, and the cause of it was that we had not the knowledge of the business required, and had not really the grit to see it through. Anyhow, you all know that the Canterbury people took over the Wairau freezing-works and erected works at Picton. Since then our market has improved wonderfully. I am only speaking now of the position then and now. As I said, we were only getting from 6s. to 8s. for fat stock then. Last season we readily got from 9s. 6d. to 10s. 6d. for our lambs from the Christchurch Meat Company, freezing at Picton. They had to pay freight of course, on that; and our wethers brought from 10s. to 12s. They took from Nelson the whole surplus fat sheep available, between six and seven thousand. They cleaned the market, and at the present time, owing to that, our prices for fat sheep off turnips are 18s. to 19s. Our sales the week before last were 18s. 9d. to 19s. 4d. Our hoggets brought 15s., fat. Our store-sheep market was also greatly improved. I can hardly say from the Christchurch Meat Company coming up, but from our advertising the depressed state of our sheep-market, which brought Canterbury buyers up to Nelson, and by competition they improved our market very considerably. We were selling store sheep at from 3s. to 5s. last year, and now they are bringing from 6s. to 9s.

290. What tooth?—Two-tooth up to full-mouth. Last year full-mouth ewes brought from 7s. to 9s. The Canterbury buyers drove through to Christchurch some twenty-six thousand sheep from Nelson. The company took from the Sounds in Nelson some twenty thousand, and I consider that is the reason why our present sheep-market is very much better than it was before the Christchurch Meat Company came here. I am satisfied now that, since the company erected works at Picton, the Nelson farmers have very much improved their position financially, and also their way of farming. This is our second year. The year previous to this season they only took from us a few hundreds—I think it was under a thousand—but during the coming season I have not the slightest doubt they will take from fourteen to sixteen thousand from the Nelson District alone. With regard to the weight of our sheep and prices as compared with Canterbury—I know the North Island people have a grievance, because I have heard that from Mr. Buchanan—I think as time goes on we shall get nearer to the Christchurch prices. Personally, I do not think we have a great deal to complain of. The weights of our sheep are: Our lambs average 34·5 lb., that is about 2 lb. higher than the Marlborough lambs. Our wethers are lighter, and only average about 51·6 lb. They did not buy old ewes last year at all. I may say that personally I sent as many sheep to the works as any Nelson farmer. I sent some 669 sheep to the works last year.

291. On foot?—No. They shipped them, and the freight is 9d. per head. There is one thing I think you could recommend to the Government that would do good to Nelson and give it a lift: that is, with regard to the wharfage. To my mind it is excessive. It is 2d. a head, and where you send away ten thousand sheep it represents a large sum of money. I think a recommendation from this Committee would help the Nelson farmer very much. There is another recommendation I should like to ask you to make—with reference to railway facilities. We have no convenience whatever on the railway for trucking our stock. We have some forty miles of railway, and I am sure that if the Government were to put convenient cattle-trucks on the line, the same as they do in other parts of the colony, and give us, say, four or five of them, our sheep could be landed in very much better condition than they are now. It takes four days to drive through from my place to the Port, and some farmers have a greater distance to go, and we do not get the credit we should do if we had those trucks. We have no cattle- or sheep-trucks. We have to put our stock in the ordinary goods-trucks, and some of them get smothered. A butcher bought two or three hundred sheep at Motueka, and before he got them to Port half of them were smothered.

292. *Mr. Hornsby.*] Can you tell the Committee how the Nelson sheep compare with the North Island sheep with regard to quality? What is the breed of your sheep?—Generally Romney. We have some half-bred, but not many. Our general type of sheep is Romney. Our lambs are Romney, with a Blackface cross.

293. Have you ever seen prime North Island sheep in numbers?—I cannot say that I have. I have had no experience in the North Island. I bought North Island sheep some years ago and killed them, but not very many. I was a butcher myself before I went on the land.

294. How do the company deal with you as farmers: do they buy on your farm?—Yes.