

said at the Colonial Conference, the meat arrives at some of the places with the bloom gone, and with an unpresentable appearance. He had an interview with a salesman in Manchester, and he said he would take our meat, but it was not good when it arrived. It was half spoiled when it got there.

111. You told us that the meat was dumped down in London and was allowed to distribute itself; is that the case? Do not the large companies have shops in different places?—One has three hundred shops, and when they get a wire for meat it is sent away. But we do not get away from the fact that London is the most expensive port, owing to the number of hands the meat has to pass through. The meat is liable to great damage on that account.

112. If you wanted to send a carcase to Warwick, would there be much difficulty in sending it from London or Liverpool?—I do not know where Warwick is. Supposing you sent a carcase from Liverpool to London, you would have to pay less than if you sent it from London to Liverpool. There would be a difference of 3d. in the railage in favour of Liverpool.

113. Can you give us any idea of what the extra cost would be in distribution by having so many distributing-centres?—I do not think there would be any for the guaranteed stuff. We would have one agent, and firms like Borthwick, the C. and D. Company, would supply their shops from these markets because they would be nearer to the centres than to London. There would be no loss.

114. Can you give any approximate idea of what the cost would be of carrying out your proposal?—I think that is a question that could not be answered. All the shipments we would require to take from the London market to improve the London market would not amount to a great sum.

115. *Mr. Haselden.*] How much would you be prepared to lose on this venture, because 1d. per carcase would not be much?—You cannot possibly tell.

116. But supposing you and I were going into the venture and said that we were prepared to lose £1,000, we might have to lose £100,000?—You take power to levy a rate to make up the loss whatever it is.

117. Do you not think that if the farmers all united and sent their meat Home on their own account as a co-operative company, dealing with the whole as one big freezing-company, would it not be preferable?—What would be the use of that, if we sent more meat to London than there is demand for?

118. What are we to do with our sheep—we must send it Home?—But you need not send it Home to one port. I am afraid it is too late to do what you say. Dealing with the storage question the gentleman I referred to as being connected with the Canterbury Farmers' Association writes: "I do think, however, that New Zealand could run a store of her own with very great advantage for frozen meat. The charges here are outrageous, and the ring is so secure that no concessions can be got. Such a store could be fitted up for £50,000 or £100,000, and charges for storage could be much reduced." I maintain that if we take a lot of the meat from London we have a chance of relieving the stores there; but so long as we keep those stores filled up to the brim we shall never get any reduction in the charges.

J. D. RITCHIE, Secretary for Agriculture, examined. (No. 20.)

119. *The Chairman.*] The opinion has been expressed by members of this Committee that you would be in a position to give considerable information on the matters referred to them, and you have therefore been asked to attend. We shall therefore be glad to hear what you have to say on the question?—For the last year or two we have not had very much to do with the matter. The last I had to do in connection with it was when I sent round the report of Mr. Cameron, our London agent, copies of which I have handed round this morning, with some suggestions for improving our produce. I do not think it would be well for me to go into the matter at present, for that report deals fully with what he thinks should be done, and what I think should be done. Since the report was written we have had another report to the effect that a good deal of the mutton that has gone Home this year has not been quite up to the mark, which he regrets very much.

120. What was the cause of that?—It was inferior and not up to the usual standard, and he points out a very great loss is likely to ensue by allowing such stock to go Home unless it is properly marked; and in this last report he lays very great stress on the necessity for branding the meat and grading it before it goes Home. I know that there is considerable diversity of opinion regarding the question of grading and branding, but Mr. Cameron, who takes a great deal of interest in both, has a strong opinion that it should be done. I have a letter here written by Mr. Cameron some time ago about the branding of some sheep that we sent Home, and he speaks very strongly, and also very flatteringly, upon the brand that was used. He says that he showed it to a great many people, and they were all very well satisfied with it, although they had expressed themselves against branding. Mr. Cameron is in favour of the meat being branded, and reasons are set out in this leaflet why it should be done. I also think it should be taken in hand, and that we ought to see that our meat goes Home under a brand and under a proper grade. At present under the Act we inspect all meat going Home, so far as inspection by a "vet." is concerned; but beyond that we do not go. There is power under the Act to appoint graders—or, rather, not to appoint, but to approve of graders appointed to the different freezing-works. None of the freezing companies have asked us to approve of their graders, and I doubt whether it is advisable that we should if they asked us to do so, because it is difficult to approve of a man who is entirely out of your control. He is not our servant, but the servant of the freezing company, and to approve of a person who is under another person's control is rather an awkward thing to do, and I should not like to recommend the Government to appoint any grader at the works who is to remain the servant of the company. If the grading is to be done, it should be done by a man employed by the Department. I have a specimen of the brand I spoke of, and perhaps some