

TUESDAY, 4TH AUGUST, 1903.

H. C. CAMERON, Esq., Produce Commissioner, examined. (No. 4.)

1. *Mr. Buchanan.*] The first item in the order of evidence relates to the quality of sheep bred. Do you agree, Mr. Cameron, that the best Argentine frozen mutton imported into England is as good as the best North Island mutton?—The best quality of Argentine meat which goes on the Home market is greatly superior to what it was a few years ago. The quantity, however, is not yet very great. Personally I cannot say with what rapidity the quantity of superior mutton will increase, but from hearsay evidence I understand there is every probability of it increasing considerably. The quality of the best River Plate mutton I have seen at Home I consider to be equal to the best of North Island mutton, and also to Southland and Dunedin mutton, and the ordinary run of Canterbury mutton.

2. In a cutting from the *Australasian* I find it reported that in 1899, 3,935 Lincoln pure-bred sheep were imported into the Argentine, 391 Hampshires, 284 Shropshires, 502 Rambouillet, 74 Oxford Down, 30 Leicester, and 2,311 Mestizo Lincoln. These were mostly rams. With the knowledge we all have that for years past the Argentine has been far and away the best customer for the sellers of pure-bred stock in England, is there any reason why, as time goes on, frozen mutton generally from the Argentine should not be as good as New Zealand?—I know of no reason why it should not be as good as New Zealand. I fear the competition, and think they will improve their mutton and overtake us in quality as well as in quantity.

3. Have you any complaint to make against the slaughtering and grading of frozen mutton from New Zealand?—No, I think the sheep I see coming Home are slaughtered and dressed in an entirely satisfactory manner for the Home market.

4. Are you acquainted, for instance, with the Wellington Meat Export Company's brand?—Yes.

5. Are you aware that that brand is always sold without recourse to arbitration?—I have heard so; but, certainly, I do not know that.

6. Are you not aware of the general custom of the trade; as to what extent c.i.f. purchasers in London have the power to call for a survey and get an allowance if the quality and grading are not up to the representations made when the meat was sold?—Yes; I understand there is a clause in contracts that, if the meat is not up to the quality and grade represented, the purchaser has the right to call for arbitration to settle the point, and if it is not according to the agreed-upon quality he gets an allowance.

7. Are you not aware that the Wellington Meat Export Company and some other companies in New Zealand sell their meat without any power of recourse by the purchaser to an arbitration court?—I have heard so, but, personally, I do not know.

8. How does the slaughtering and grading of New Zealand meat compare with that done by the Argentine companies?—The slaughtering and dressing of New Zealand mutton is better on the whole than Argentine. The grading is entirely different in New Zealand, and more elaborate. In the Argentine they do not divide their mutton into so many classes.

9. *Mr. Aitken.*] You said, in reply to Mr. Buchanan, that the grading was much more elaborate in New Zealand than in the Argentine; do you think it is too elaborate here?—Well, I would scarcely care to give an opinion as to that, seeing that the grading that is now in force in the various freezing-works here is the outcome of many years' experience on the part of those specially interested in it.

10. What I mean is this; do you think the grading has a prejudicial effect in London—that is to say, if the Argentine people have perhaps fewer grades they have an advantage, inasmuch as the butcher knows what is meant by grades 1, 2, and 3?—No; I rather approve of grading for this reason; that a buyer desirous of obtaining a certain class of mutton has a better chance of getting it than if it were sold on a long line, subject to that line being of a certain average weight. If the sheep are divided into subdivisions he can get what suits his purpose better than by buying an average line.

11. Then it is an advantage to have the severe grading which New Zealand mutton goes through?—I think so.

12. *Sir W. R. Russell.*] You say in your report, "Very often complaints are made at Home by those handling our meat of the deterioration in quality of much of it." Have you observed yourself this deterioration?—The complaint in London is that there are not such large quantities of prime New Zealand mutton going Home as there used to be. My explanation of this complaint is that, there having been a very large increase in the quantity of mutton sent Home from New Zealand in recent years, compared with what was sent ten or twelve years ago, there may be still as many prime sheep going Home as formerly, but the proportion is less, and consequently good quality is not so noticeable as it was formerly.

13. What form does the deterioration take?—The complaint is regarding the quality of mutton not being so good as it formerly was.

14. By the quality, do you mean that the breed is not so good, or that it is improperly grown, or what?—The quality means really the breed of sheep. The small, nuggety, well-matured mutton which gave the repute to New Zealand exports has been lost, they say. The apparent quantity of that fine class of mutton is now less on the market than it was before, and the general run of mutton is becoming more uniform. The North Island mutton is not now so distinct from Canterbury mutton as it used to be. It is maintained that Canterbury mutton is deteriorating in quality, while North Island mutton is improving.

15. But has not the average weight of sheep, not quality, improved?—I think from the statistics I have seen that is so. I, of course, merely give you the report made by those who are interested directly in the handling of the meat in London. My own belief is that these complaints arise from the smaller proportion of fine mutton that goes Home now.