

can afford to buy New Zealand meat will take it in preference. At times like the present, when New Zealand mutton reaches a high price, the retailers are forced to take Argentine meat in preference, and the danger is in their customers getting used to it, and not always going back to New Zealand meat.

67. Supposing the New Zealand Government-established a shop where the Argentine people have a shop now, and the Argentine people started to cut prices, what effect would that have on the New Zealand meat?—They could cut the price, because they have a strong hand.

68. If they cut the price, would that not have the effect of reducing New Zealand values?—Yes, undoubtedly. You must take that into calculation all the time. The Argentine people have a strong hand; they can sell cheaper and at a profit, and they can always put our prices down.

69. Therefore if they compete strongly against us it will have the effect of deteriorating rather than increasing our price?—Yes; I think so. Any organized hostility would have a detrimental effect upon the price of New Zealand meat.

70. It is contemplated by Mr. Cameron only to start a few shops. Do you think a few shops would have any appreciable effect on prices in this colony—say, if there were only a dozen shops?—I can hardly see how it would be possible.

71. Did you take any notice of the C. C. and D. Company's business in London?—Yes; I saw their list, and so on.

72. Do you think it has a very wide-reaching effect?—Yes.

73. Is it your opinion that the New Zealand farmer is doing very well just now with his meat?—Well, I do not know that the New Zealand farmer would care about my opinion on that point being recorded.

74. Do you think the New Zealand farmer ever got a steadier or better price for his produce than he does now?—No.

75. Would you therefore be inclined to let well alone?—I should.

JOHN HOLMES, Export Merchant, examined. (No. 10.)

76. *The Chairman.*] We are going into the matter chiefly of handling frozen meat at Home, with the view of the colony opening shops there. I have to ask members of the Committee to put their questions as briefly as possible, and would like your replies, Mr. Holmes, also to be put as concisely as possible?—Yes.

77. *Mr. Buchanan.*] What opportunity have you had, either in New Zealand or in the Old Country, of getting personal information which would enable you to judge whether or not it would be a wise thing for New Zealand to enter into the project of opening meat-shops in England, as proposed by the Produce Commissioner, Mr. Cameron?—In my association with the frozen-meat trade, dating as far back as 1882, when I had the honour of introducing it to Marlborough—

78. The Committee wishes to confine the evidence, as far as possible, to the question of the shops?—Yes; but I take it that if the Committee want me to answer a question they must allow me to answer it in my own way; secondly, I take it that the Committee want to ascertain if I know anything about the trade to justify me in forming a fair opinion on what I have to say. Personally, I have been long associated with the frozen-meat trade, right up from 1882 to the present moment. I have also represented large meat-importers in England, and in my peregrinations abroad I saw that there were a number of people directly opposed to the introduction of New Zealand frozen meat, partly from prejudice and partly from interested motives. With regard to the meat-shops themselves, if they are established for the purpose of advertising New Zealand frozen meat, then, I take it that anything that will remove the disabilities under which the present frozen-meat trade labours will do a great deal of good—not only for the producer, but also for the colony as a whole.

79. Did you go into the question of the method of selling it at Home by retail when you were there to see whether it would be advisable for New Zealand to start frozen-meat shops in England?—No; I did not go into the details, but I found that other companies and other countries were using every means to advertise their products, whether they were frozen-meat or other commodities, as far as possible, and that, as far as New Zealand was concerned, the steps taken were somewhat limited. As I said, if the prejudice could be removed, I think it would be a good thing, but whether it should be by opening shops or advertising I am not here to determine for the moment.

80. *Hon. Sir J. G. Ward.*] You know that the price paid for the meat to the New Zealand farmers, for the last two or three years particularly, has been very high?—I do.

81. It has been given in evidence that the price obtained for New Zealand meat is higher than that obtained by the farmer in any other country of the world. Do you think that, in view of our having reached the utmost limit of sheep going out of the colony—to judge by the export returns—we could, under existing conditions, do anything to maintain the high level which the farmers have now attained?—That is a somewhat difficult question to answer without taking into consideration the competition which we must inevitably face from the River Plate, our strongest competitor. If their increasing stock is coming up to a level with ours, it is questionable how long we shall maintain the supremacy of prices which we have now reached. My own impression is that there is a great deal yet to be done in the direction of developing the frozen-meat trade and dairy-produce business of this country. For instance, when I had the honour of speaking in Liverpool in 1897, I suggested, amongst other things, that the guardians of various public institutions should include New Zealand frozen meat in their provision contracts. A gentleman who heard me on that occasion afterwards said that my remarks had borne fruit, and that a tender had been invited and accepted for Canterbury frozen mutton. Later on he wrote me saying that a fraud had been committed by the contractors, and he had exposed it. The contract was cancelled, and he again tendered for it at a later stage. He tells me in his subsequent letter that, although he had tendered at bed-rock