

The Birkenhead graving-docks are three in number, their floors being respectively 930 ft., 750 ft., and 750 ft. long, or a total length of 2,430 ft.

There is also a gridiron at the Clarence Graving-dock basin, on the Liverpool side, 313 ft. 6 in. long and 25 ft. 6 in. broad.

All the wet and dry docks, with the exception of the two belonging to the London and North-western Railway Company, are the property of, and are controlled by, the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board.

The colossal nature of the harbour-works undertaken and executed may be understood when it is stated that the Docks and Harbour Board obtained parliamentary powers at various times to borrow £31,899,890 15s. 1d; it has actually borrowed £24,227,543, and has expended £29,484,677 15s. 1d.—the difference between the two latter amounts being made up by moneys obtained from sinking fund and sundry credit balances. The Board has still power to borrow £7,672,347 13s. 7d.

Drawbacks.—Despite this enormous expenditure, and the skill displayed in the construction and equipment of the docks, the Port of Liverpool still labours under many disabilities. There is no complaint as to expedition of discharge and loading. Large steamers can discharge their cargo and have it all cleared from the quay-sheds without incurring the space-charge levied by the Board on all goods not removed within seventy-two hours after being landed; can reload and be out of the docks on the fourth day after arrival. Nevertheless, the methods of handling are such as cause great deterioration to perishable goods like meat and butter. The docks are cut off from the goods-stations of the various railway companies by a broad roadway, and imports have to be landed in the transit-sheds, reloaded on to drays, and carted to stores or railway-stations. This causes extra handling; and, as the Board provides no cool transit-sheds or refrigerated stores, meat and butter suffer great deterioration in the handling and transit. I watched the process of landing frozen meat, and it requires no experience to characterize it as of the rudest and most unsatisfactory kind. The carcasses are unloaded from the ship's slings on to the floor of a high one-story shed, with glass roof, through which the sun beats. It was raining part of the time I made observations, and a quantity of straw was spread on the floor of the shed to prevent the meat coming in contact with muddy slush. From this straw the carcasses are loaded by hand into open drays, which sometimes stand for over half an hour before they are fully loaded, as the meat is sorted out to the different consignees before being put on the drays. In these open drays the meat is carted to the stores of importers, to the Union Cold-storage Company's premises, or to the goods-stations of the different railway companies—the distances ranging from a quarter of a mile to a mile and a half. Whether the weather be wet or sunny, meat and dairy-produce are sure to suffer from exposure; and I heard besides many complaints of meat being bruised and the shank-bones of sheep broken through rough handling.

I called on the manager of the Union Cold-storage Company and stated to him my opinion of the methods of handling and carting frozen meat as I had observed them. He said that the question of providing proper covering for the meat while being carted was engaging his attention. He added that the ships ought not to put out meat in wet weather.

When I mentioned these matters to the dock authorities, they informed me that the Board provided no refrigerated stores except by arrangement. Thus, by agreement with the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, the Board had erected insulated stores alongside the docks, into which vessels from Canada discharge produce. New Zealand could have similar facilities if the Government or shippers made an arrangement with the Docks and Harbour Board. The South American Meat Company had erected cold-stores at the docks and provided insulated vans for conveying their meat to the merchants' stores or railway-stations. The dock authorities further stated that it was for the importers to provide insulated vans or covered drays for conveying the meat from the docks to the stores or railway-stations. Some of them have done this, while in other cases the railway companies supply insulated vans.

TRADE IN NEW ZEALAND PRODUCE.

Opinions of Importers.

Frozen Meat.—The local manager of a firm dealing largely in frozen mutton said the west-coast steam service was a great convenience to them. Their only complaint was with regard to the irregularity of the sailings. Last year, for example, three months' shipments came to hand in one steamer. This irregularity causes a temporary scarcity, followed by a glut, with the result that trade is disarranged. New Zealand meat generally arrives in good condition, and the quality is all that can be desired; but, practically, the Argentine meat has a monopoly of the Lancashire market. New Zealand lamb arrives rather late—falling on top of the Argentine and Australian.

The manager of another large meat-importing firm had the same remark to make on the subject of the irregularity of the steamer service. He said that a number of wholesale dealers, especially those who are also interested in the retail trade, prefer to buy New Zealand lamb in London, and pay the railway freight, rather than endure the uncertainty produced by the irregularity of the west-coast steamers. Although the long voyage rather takes the bloom off the meat, it generally arrives in good condition.

Yet another gentleman connected with the meat trade had a similar complaint as to irregularity. In consequence of the uncertainty of the arrival of New Zealand shipments, meat from Australia and Argentine is most in demand in Liverpool. If the west-coast steamers were more regular, and if some inferior meat were sent, New Zealand mutton and lamb would find a much larger market. New Zealand meat is of superior quality, but it costs the consumer $\frac{1}{2}$ d. per pound more. As a rule, the consumer does not know what country the meat is from; he looks only at the price. One or two companies, however, sell New Zealand meat as such. He did not think that