

59. Do they sell cheaper than you do for the same class of timber?—Not to the same people. We are selling to the Canterbury merchants at about the same price that they are selling.

60. Would you say they have a greater profit than you have down here?—No, I should not say that. I think many of the mills on the West Coast are like many of the mills here—they are existing only. I am quite satisfied of that.

61. It has been said that our timber will be cut out in Southland in about six years' time: do you agree with that statement?—Certainly not.

62. How long would you give it, in your opinion?—I think there will be timber cut down here in thirty-five years' time.

63. What do you base that opinion upon?—My knowledge of the country.

64. Is not the red-pine rapidly diminishing?—To the extent of the cutting, yes, but not anything like so rapidly as it was twelve months ago.

65. Is there anything like the amount of red-pine obtainable here now?—Yes. Immediately you increase the price even 6d. it brings other areas to the market and increases the means of communication. Boats will go to a place to-morrow, figuratively speaking, but they will not go to-day, and the railway is being extended. The Catlin's Railway is being extended straight through the bush now, and it will go right through the Tokonui and other bushes.

66. Taking the Tokonui Bush, what class of timber is to be obtained there for milling purposes?—Red-pine and miro. There are about 3,000 acres in that.

67. And you give the life at about thirty-five years?—I think it is a most difficult thing to say. I can only tell you that twenty-five years ago Professor Kirk told me that kauri would be cut out in fifteen years. My opinion is that they will be cutting kauri in thirty years, and I think it will be the same with red-pine. When I started down here red-pine was to have been cut out in fifteen years, and I have been here for over a quarter of a century now. I shall never see it cut out if I live an average life. The hauling-engine has trebled the life of the sawmilling bush. Then, the Government are constantly removing their forest reserves, taking the reserves off areas which, when I started, could never be opened to the public for sawmilling purposes, otherwise I should have been out of the timber business ten years ago. They are extending the railway up the Waiau district, and there is a large area of timber west of the Waiau River which would be tapped.

68. What did you pay for the bush to private owners twenty years ago?—I paid up to £2 10s. an acre twenty years ago, and also £1 an acre, and some I bought including the land and bush at something like 12s. 6d. an acre twenty-four years ago.

69. What have you been paying during the last three years?—Well, I bought very little land three years ago.

70. Do you know what prices have been paid?—I think some as high as £3, £4, and £5 an acre. It depends upon the situation so much. Some bush is cheap if it is alongside the railway at £6 an acre, and other bush would be dear at £1 an acre—it depends on the quality as well as the locality.

71. Do you send much timber to Christchurch and Dunedin?—Yes. Six times as much to Dunedin as to Christchurch.

72. Is the demand decreasing or increasing?—Decreasing in Dunedin enormously.

73. Are you being put out of the market there?—There is hardly any market. I do not think it is due to increased competition, but due to the extraordinary depression. There is not half the building going on in Dunedin that there was nine or twelve months ago.

74. So far as Southland is concerned, what is the position here?—A great falling-off, but not to the extent up yonder.

75. Do you expect there will be an increase in the price?—No; I do not anticipate any increase in the price in the next ten years.

76. Do you think there will be any decrease, from what you can see?—I think there will be.

77. What do you base that on?—Because of the increased competition—there are so many more mills. Nine or twelve months ago we had a very good time, and many more mills were put up in consequence. The demand has fallen off enormously now, and we are now faced with the increased number of mills.

78. Do you think the tendency will be for prices to go down?—I do. Indeed, if they go down, as one gentleman remarked, what can you expect when we get £4,000,000 less for our exports?

79. Can you say who is getting the benefit of the reduced freights on timber recently made by the Government?—The consumer, of course. We have nothing to do with the freights—the consumer at the other end pays that. If he can get it at 1s. a hundred less he benefits. Competition reduces all those things.

80. Do you advocate that the freights on the railway should be reduced?—I do not think so. I do not think it is more than paying now. I do not see that it is paying them; because the trucks go from here loaded with timber, and two out of three come back empty, because there is no return freight.

81. Can you tell us why these other millers have not come into your association that were referred to?—I think our association is an association and it is not an association.

82. Do you find that the association stands to the price?—Yes, when there is a good demand.

83. But at times there are failures to observe the agreement?—At all times.

84. Why did you form that association?—Because a contractor would come into our office and ask us the price of timber, and we would say, for instance, the price was 6s. He would then go to another sawmiller and ask what was the price, and they would probably also say 6s., and the contractor would then say, "I have just left So-and-so and he has offered it to us at 5s. 6d.," and we could not prove he had not, and in self-defence we were bound to have some understanding amongst ourselves.

85. Would you say that a cutting-down of the price of timber would lead to a reduction in the wages of the men?—It would inevitably have that tendency.