

39. From 1901 am I correct in saying that the millers' prices have increased by something like 300 per cent.?—Certainly not.

40. Well, 30 per cent.?—No, not even that.

41. Well, what percentage?—I should think about 20 per cent., although I am not quite certain what the prices were in 1901. I should say about 25 per cent.

42. As regards the wages of the workers, what has been the increase since 1901?—The wages of the workmen have gone up about 15 per cent. I should say 20 per cent. probably, because we are giving more than the award.

43. At what mill do you pay the highest wages in Southland?—No mill pays higher than another that I know of.

44. What price did you pay for bush that you have bought from private persons within the last five years?—We pay equal to the Government royalty of 6d. It comes to about £1 15s. an acre. We generally estimate it on the quantity.

45. Do you find it difficult to obtain bush?—Yes, very great. It is very very difficult to get bush now.

46. Something has been said in regard to increasing the areas of bush—what is your opinion on that point?—I think it is most important from the sawmillers' point of view. We cannot get enough area, and we should have at least from 1,200 to 1,500 acres, instead of 800. They really want double the area, or more than that.

47. Are you aware of any reason that is likely to increase the price of timber?—I am sorry to say it is the other way about. In fact, the tendency has been to reduce it. The prices have been reduced since the last price-list came out.

48. As regards the wages of the men, would you say the tendency would be the same?—It should be so, of course. That should follow suit, there is no doubt about that.

49. *Mr. Jennings.*] What is the length of the lease granted by the Crown to the sawmillers in this district?—Two years for every 200 acres.

50. That is the time given for cutting it?—Yes.

51. Then does it revert back to the Crown?—Yes.

52. Who re-lease it again or sell to the farmer?—Yes. The sawmiller has no right at all to the land. He has a surface right only to remove timber during a specified time.

53. You never sublease?—No.

54. Have you any knowledge of the amount of bush that has been destroyed by fire?—No, it is impossible to get a record of that. I have been through great quantities of it.

55. You have seen where the timber has been destroyed?—It is visible to-day—beautiful logs charred up and destroyed.

56. *Mr. Field.*] We have heard a great deal at Riverton and also here about the loss some millers were being put to on account of the duty of 2s. 6d. on beech timber in Australia: will you give us your opinion on that?—There is no doubt it is a real grievance. From the point of view of the sawmillers it would be very advisable if reciprocity could be arranged with the Federal Government; but from the point of view of the Dominion it seems to me we should lose by it.

57. The fact remains that a number of mills have been built for the purpose of pushing this trade, and they are now idle?—Yes, it is a serious hardship for them. I think they have built these mills on the understanding that they were sure of a market for birch.

58. What do you say about beech for the purpose of manufacturing furniture?—It is a splendid thing.

59. Does it take the grain and polish?—Yes, a beautiful polish.

60. Assuming this trade with Australia ceases, what is going to become of this beech timber?—It seems to me to be absolutely useless. It will probably be burnt and the ground cleared.

61. Except for the small quantity used here?—Yes, for broom-handles; but the demand is very small. It would mean a big loss.

62. You say you were paying about £1 15s. per acre for timber—you are buying timber only?—Yes, timber only.

63. How many feet to the acre is such land as that?—Say, about 6,000 probably, or slightly over. It varies, sometimes only 4,000. We have bought it from 10s. up to a few years ago. Say, from £1 5s. to £1 15s.

64. How is it that the association here does not rule the prices for timber in this part of the country?—They cannot.

65. From that we are to understand that the competition from outside is keeping the prices down?—Yes, competition from our own millers themselves, and also from outside. There is a heap of competition.

66. Even if more mills joined the association, would it be possible to fix the prices?—No.

67. Have you had any experience of Oregon pine?—Very little. We have never dealt in it at all. I have seen it in the yards and in buildings.

68. It does not affect you seriously here?—Yes, it does most decidedly. I have just returned from up north, and the question I asked our representative was why he did not get more orders, and he gave the reason that the Oregon was the cause of it, and that if the Oregon was not here the red-pine would have been used.

69. What is the indication—that Oregon is on the increase or decrease?—On the increase.

70. Do you know as to whether the supply is very large and inexhaustible?—Only from hearsay. I have been told it is inexhaustible.

71. Assuming that Oregon pine largely supplants our timber, what is going to be the result to our rimu-timber bush?—Then we cannot afford to cut our timber, and it would have to be destroyed, because I presume the land would have to be cleared. In twenty years' time Oregon may be just as cheap as it is now.