

127. In building cottages in those days, were ranges put into the cottages?—In a good many of them, as far back as twenty years ago. As a matter of fact, the timber in those days in the cottages was heavier than now, because at present there is a scheme to make framework as light as possible.

128. So the sawmiller to-day has more sawing?—Yes, it is his own fault, through increasing the price.

129. Could you have kept the price down to 3s. 9d.?—No, I do not say so. I do not say they should not be allowed a fair increase on those prices. You cannot call from 3s. 9d. to 10s. 6d. a very small rise.

130. You tell us, on your cottage property you got about 7 per cent. only, and out of that you had to pay rates and taxes: do you think that a fair return?—No, but you cannot get any more.

131. Do you think the sawmillers have earned that?—I think they have and more. Some of them are reputed millionaires out of it.

132. What do you think, considering the short life of our business and risks, would be a fair return?—I have not had any experience.

*Mr. Leyland:* I wish to put in evidence the actual cost of producing New Zealand timber, under special and favourable conditions.

*Hon. the Chairman:* I will ask you for that later on. You can ask him questions.

133. *Mr. Clarke.]* Dealing with the question of prices there has been reference made to the increased cost of a building containing, say, 15,000 ft. of timber; 1s. rise on that would amount to £7 10s. in timber only. I notice in your prices a good many lines have risen very much, more in proportion than the others. For instance, from 6s. 6d. to 10s. 6d., while others are quoted at 14s. 6d. and up to £1. There will be a large proportion of the timber in the ordinary building that would be included in those higher prices?—All the dressed lines, of course. For instance, in that statement I made about the difference in the cost of two lines in the job I have finished—close on 50,000 ft. of dressed material—there is £194 difference, and I think, even if any of you like to work that amount out on an average of twenty men on a mill, you will find that there is a very fair margin of profit over and above everything.

134. Allowing for the greater increase on raw material generally, if you take for the last ten years, where it is allowed that the price has gone up 4s. per hundred, that would not represent the real rise or the average rise of all timber used on the building?—Nothing like it. Some have gone up a good bit more. That only applies to rough timber, and on rough timber up to 8 in. in width—over that it increases 6d. per inch.

135. The average increase would be more than 4s.?—I should not be a bit surprised if it would not amount to nearly double that.

136. At 1s. per hundred on 15,000 it would make a difference of £7 10s.—if we say 4s. per hundred, that would make £30, but that being nearly double, as you say, does not the cost further increase, and would not the difference be £60 instead of £30 in a house of that size?—It would follow if you worked it that way. You would have to include all mouldings, &c., which have gone up enormously. The timber-merchants state that was their average cost on the whole of their output.

137. Have you found any inconvenience in the matter of lengths? Have you been able to get long timbers for your work?—You can bring them from Sydney and Melbourne quicker, and then these are drier.

138. Then, with regard to lath-and-plaster work, have you any by-laws in this borough dealing specially with this or as to seasoning certain classes of dried timber?—No, I do not think it applies in that respect. There are by-laws in the inner area, but they do not specify the class of timber that is to be used.

139. What do your architects do when they are specifying this class of work?—Architects here are generally giving up lath-and-plastering altogether on account of the plaster breaking away.

140. That would be the result of using timber which was unsuitable?—I think so.

141. Then, with regard to future supplies, as a builder you would be glad of anything that would tend to procure future supplies for the work, and not to find our timbers worked out too quickly?—As builders we want to get the timber as cheaply as we can, because it would tend to increase work.

142. If Oregon can be used to take the place of some of our local timbers for some of the finer work and for work that is painted, would it not be preferable to use Oregon in rough work, and use our better timbers for better work?—It would if it was all good timber, but of course I understand there is a large proportion of milling-timber not fit for dressing. In fact, the timber we are getting here now and paying 10s. 6d. for is not nearly so good as the second-class we used to get. It is graded very fine.

143. *Mr. Morris.]* You told us you were opposed to any reduction of duty on Oregon pine?—No. I am opposed to any increase of the duty. You can reduce it as much as you like. There is very little used here, because it is too expensive.

144. It does not concern you very much?—It concerns us in this respect: that previous to this late importation we had to bring it from Melbourne and Sydney, and the cheapest that you can bring it from there is £1 2s. If it is landed in Dunedin we can get it round here direct at about 15s. or 16s., which would make a difference to us. If you take the duty off it would be reduced by 2s., which would help us.

145. You state that Oregon is very much stronger and superior to rimu for joists?—For the same size, all engineers agree that that is so. I have not tested it myself personally, but there are engineers in this town who state they can do with a third less in thickness.

146. You might be surprised to hear that the architects in Wellington specify for a larger size in Oregon in cases where they use it instead of rimu?—I should be surprised.