

profit of 1s. clear, so that the smallest miller would clear £2 10s. a day. Is that so?—You do not work every day in the year, and there is a lot of lost time, and it is impossible to arrive at it neatly.

177. *Mr. Mander.*] Do you think a reduction of the duty on Oregon would cheapen the cost of an ordinary workman's cottage to any material extent?—No, it would not affect it at all.

178. Now, is it not a fact that there is a great deal of loss in stacking the timber in the yard and holding it, and the risk of splitting?—Yes.

179. What would you consider a fair price between the wholesale and retail price after stacking it and the expense of the yard?—About 2s. 6d.

180. Do you think that would pay?—Fairly.

181. Is it not a fact that some of these small millers may be very good bushmen, and may be able to produce timber cheaply, but yet not be able to handle the timber apart from the mill?—It would not pay them to sell here in the country. They nearly all want a cheque at the end of the month to pay the men. They get the cash in a lump sum from us, and they very often want their cheques in advance. There is one thing I wished to mention that would cheapen the price of timber, and that is a reduction in the railage. I think the railage is too high.

GABRIEL HODGES sworn and examined. (No. 24.)

1. *Hon. the Chairman.*] In what way are you interested in the timber business?—I am a builder. I cannot give you any information as to the cost of cutting and felling at the mill. I was present at a meeting of the Builders' Association, and the resolution which was submitted and agreed to has my approval.

2. What was the resolution?—That we favour the importation of Oregon or other foreign timbers. I may say that the importation of Oregon provides for a felt want in this portion of New Zealand. As a builder I have had great difficulty in procuring long lengths of either red-pine, totara, or kauri at a price that compares at all favourably with Oregon.

3. As a builder, do you consider the present prices in any way detrimental to the volume of work?—You mean the present prices charged in New Zealand?

4. Yes?—Prices have gone up, but those charged in Dunedin compare favourably with the prices in any other centre in New Zealand.

5. If the prices were lower, do you think that would add to the volume of work?—I suppose if you can buy an article 10 or 15 per cent. cheaper than the current prices it must tend in a slight degree in that direction.

6. You are not aware of the cost of dressing timber?—No, I cannot say anything on that question.

7. Is the building trade in Dunedin proportionately going on as formerly?—There is a dull time. The man in the street says it is financial pressure, but I do not think that that is so. We recognise there is a slight depression, but to what it is due I cannot say. Taking the trade generally, the orders are not so numerous.

8. *Mr. Arnold.*] How long have you been in business?—About thirty-five years, and most of the time in Dunedin.

9. Has there been a time in your experience when the building trade was slacker than at present?—Yes, I believe there was.

10. About how long ago—seventeen years ago?—Yes, I remember in Dunedin it commenced to fall off about 1890. Then there was a slump.

11. Can you recall the prices of timber at that time?—Not offhand.

12. Were they higher than now?—No, certainly not.

13. Lower?—Yes.

14. Considerably lower?—Yes, they would be.

15. And yet there was less building going on than there is to-day?—Naturally so, because the population was less. There was not the volume of output that there is to-day.

16. Even in proportion to the population was there not less building then?—Certainly not. Not in the boom days. Of course, there was a depreciation during the slump, but that was not due to the price of timber.

17. So that lowness in the price of timber does not necessarily mean more building?—The price of timber must regulate the number of buildings that will be erected. I am speaking of buildings for speculative purposes. Of course, if a building has to be put up it will go up.

18. If the money-market is tight it naturally follows that there will be less building?—Oh, yes!

19. Do you not think that the slackness at the present time is more in consequence of the state of the money-market—perhaps lack of confidence in speculation—than the high price of timber?—In my opinion, the price of timber compares very favourably with the price paid in other centres in New Zealand.

20. But the same thing exists right through New Zealand?—But perhaps more pronounced in other centres.

21. We are desirous that this slackness should be removed—can you suggest anything?—As I have already said, I am strongly in favour of the resolution submitted to you by the association—viz., that the import duty on junk timber be removed. It seems to me that the members of this Commission generally have not grasped the situation. It must be understood that the importation of Oregon or Australian hardwood provides for a long-felt want, and supplies us with a class of timber that we cannot get amongst our native timbers. Take Oregon, for instance, it comes here better seasoned than the local timber. We can get it in long lengths and bigger sizes, and it is cheaper to handle. It maintains its size and shape better than our local timbers. If I