

ROBERT CHISHOLM sworn and examined. (No. 37.)

1. *The Acting-Chairman (Mr. Arnold).]* What is your trade, Mr. Chisholm?—I am a furniture-manufacturer.

2. You will know something about various kinds of timbers, both local and imported?—Yes.

3. You are acquainted with the Catlin's district?—Yes.

4. Would you tell us to what extent local timbers are used in your business, and generally as to their suitability?—Some local timbers are admirably adapted for furniture-making. The rimu, birch, and kauri are all extensively used for that purpose, and found very suitable. The rimu in particular is specially suitable, although perhaps you cannot say it is more so than kauri, as they are very much about equal in demand.

5. Is there much birch used?—A considerable quantity of birch.

6. Is it very suitable?—Yes.

7. What imported timbers are used?—Imported timbers are used pretty extensively. There is the oak, walnut, clear-pine, but especially the two former—viz., oak and walnut.

8. Could local timbers be used in place of those named by you?—No, they could not be used in place of oak, which is used where it is required and asked for. The difficulty lies in the fact that there is so much furniture imported both from America, Canada, and Great Britain, and the bulk of it is made of oak, mahogany, or walnut. Some people demand that their furniture should really be made of these woods, and they will have it so made if they can possibly get it.

9. You do not use Oregon, of course?—No, not in the manufacture of furniture.

10. What duty is there on oak and other timbers?—I think it is 2s. per hundred all the way through.

11. Do you think that should be increased?—No, I do not. I have a very strong opinion that it is a mistake to have the raw material in connection with and essential to any industry taxed even to the extent that it is at present. I think while it is necessary for the purposes of revenue that there should be a certain duty on almost everything, at the same time, it seems to me that those articles that are used in the process of manufacture ought to have the duty just as low as possible.

12. That is, if it cannot be done without?—In each of these cases it cannot.

13. You would have to import them if the duty were doubled?—That is so.

14. Is there much manufactured furniture imported now?—Yes, a good deal.

15. Is it decreasing?—Yes, it is decreasing.

16. What is the cause of that?—The cause of it is that the duty that was placed some years ago upon imported furniture—viz., 25 per cent.—assisted the local manufacturers very considerably; many articles are now being made to compete successfully with the imported article.

17. The introduction of machinery, I presume, has enabled you to manufacture cheaper?—Yes, that is another and important factor enabling us to compete with the imported article. There is now about ten times as much machinery in use as there was ten years ago.

18. Your factory is up to date, then?—Yes.

19. The total cost is less all round now than it was years ago in consequence of improved methods?—I do not know that you can say that the total is less. I should say that it is more. The additional cost of labour and the additional cost of timber has increased the cost of production very considerably, even to a much greater extent than is made up by the introduction of machinery.

20. To what extent does the extra cost of timber affect your industry?—I should say it is affecting the price, probably from 10 to 15 per cent.

21. Do you think the price of timber to-day is too high?—Well, there is always a buyers-and-sellers standpoint from which the price is viewed. From what I have seen in the papers I should say that the timber-merchants are not making a fortune. I do not think, myself, when you compare the prices, that there is much to complain about. As time wears on, the sawmillers have got to go back farther, and consequently the cost of the production of the timber is increased. I do not think that the price that is charged at the present time for timber is unreasonable. Still, the very fact that we have to pay very much higher has raised the price of production.

22. I want to ask a question or two away from your own trade; have you had any timber from the Catlin's River district?—Yes.

23. What class?—Rimu and birch.

24. It is suggested that the timbers of that district are inferior to those of Southland?—I would have no hesitation in saying that the West Coast rimu is a superior class of timber to that of Catlin's River. It has many advantages over the latter. The tendency of most timber from Catlin's to twist is a good deal more, and it is not quite so suitable for cabinetmaking purposes as West Coast timber.

25. What about Southland?—In some parts of Southland there is bush where the timber resembles the West Coast timber a good deal, but, generally speaking—and I think one is perfectly safe in saying—the West Coast is superior to either Southland or Catlin's. In fact, three-fourths of the timber used by us comes from the West Coast, and has always done so.

26. *Mr. Field.]* You said you were against putting a duty on the raw material. Do you regard inch boards as raw material?—Yes, I do, because they are brought in here for the purpose of being manufactured. There is no single board but what is used in some article or another.

27. I am not speaking of Oregon boards put directly on to buildings as they are?—You never have oak or walnut put into buildings without being manufactured. My remarks did not apply to Oregon.

28. *Mr. Morris.]* You told us that the duty put on imported furniture assisted the local trade?—Yes.