

ference this, that owing to the merchants having been starved out there is no seasoned timber to be got?—If the merchants have any chance of making money they will remain, and will supply the article that is required, and if the thing is cut to such a fine degree that must be the natural consequence.

120. If people want seasoned timber they must support the timber-merchants?—Yes. If the timber-merchants were not supported the very same thing would prevail in Christchurch.

121. *Mr. Clarke.*] With regard to kauri, do you think it would be advisable to increase the export duty on kauri so that it covered all classes and all sizes in view of the great advance in the price of kauri within the last ten years?—I think it is working its own cure as far as Christchurch is concerned; but with regard to the export duty, I have not gone into the thing carefully. With regard to the price, if you refer to the figures I quoted this morning you will find there was a small amount of kauri used in very fine houses. You will find it is 480 ft. if you refer to the figures.

122. If kauri is as superior a wood as you have stated, would it not be to the advantage of this Dominion that that valuable timber should be retained, even although we imposed an export duty on it?—One naturally likes to have the best for ourselves, but at the same time it is getting a pretty broad question as to whether we should protect the industry for the sake of the few people who use kauri here. I have not gone into that matter at all.

123. I have here a price-list which shows that in 1898 12 in. kauri here was 16s., and in 1909 it is £1 9s. 6d. Do you not consider that increase out of proportion to the increase in the cost of production?—I do not know what the cost of production is.

124. Now, it is alleged there is in existence a timber ring to control the price: is there any such ring or combination existing?—We have an association here. I should like a definition of a "ring." We have an association here, and we work together for our own good. We arrange prices, and according to the statements I have given you and the privileges we receive, it is not a high price or a high rate of profit. There are other matters with reference to the association whereby we save, and are thereby enabled to sell at a lesser rate than if we had not the association. For instance, our railway down here is a bit of a pandemonium sometimes, and a little while ago before this association was in vogue every merchant had to go down to the railway or send somebody down to get his own timber. We now employ a man who is recognised by the Railway Department, to whom we pay £10 each, and it is work which used to cost us a long way more than that. We also help one another in many matters. There are matters of policy we talk over amongst ourselves the same any body of men will. With regard to prices, we have the association price-list. That is a thing we are not at all ashamed of, and we do not consider our association, or, as some people call it, a ring, has ever taken advantage of the combination to fleece the public. If you refer to the figures you will see that the percentage on our sales is a very small one.

125. Now, can a builder or any one of the general public obtain supplies from anywhere at less than the prices quoted in the price-list?—Yes, by taking 10,000 ft. of red-pine. He can get ordinary building-material at 12s. 6d. at the Christchurch station, and dressed lines at 14s. 3d.

126. *Mr. Field.*] Any buyer?—Yes, any buyer.

127. *Mr. Clarke.*] If any buyer or any builder places an all-round order for a moderate amount for the requirements of one particular contract he might have, would he have any chance of getting it at other than the list prices for a smaller quantity?—What quantities do you refer to?

128. Supposing an ordinary building order without any 10,000 ft.?—If you take an ordinary building order, say, a five-roomed cottage, you would get 10,000 ft. to start with.

129. Assuming you only wanted to build one room to-day, could a man obtain the necessary amount of timber at less than the list price?—We have merchants in Christchurch outside our association, and they use our price-lists, but how they treat the discounts, of course, is a very moot question. They may give a greater discount or they may not. If you ask them they will tell you they do not.

130. Then, in fact, your association really does control the retail price?—We have no control of anybody who is not in our association. If they choose to sell at a given rate it is a matter for them to say themselves whether they can sell at that price.

131. Would there be any difficulty put in the way of a builder or any one of the public in obtaining further supplies if he dealt with one of those men?—No. There is absolutely no power to prevent a man getting his timber where he likes, and if any one went to such a man as the one in question for the rough timber and came to us for the dressing-stuff we would supply him.

132. A given class of timber is sold at a good rate from whatever source it may come. We had a case at Riverton where it was sold on the truck for 6s. 6d. and 8s. 6d. Do you still sell it at the same price in Christchurch? It has been said in evidence that it was landed by some millers at 6s. 6d. and by others at 8s. 6d.?—We do not have any time for Southland timber, which is no good to us. We buy at 6s. 9d. and 8s. 6d. at Greymouth and Pelorus Sound, and we charge the ordinary building rate.

133. From Greymouth or Pelorus Sound, is it all the same price?—It is one price from Pelorus Sound or Greymouth.

134. So that this stuff you sell retail, plus machinery work on it, at £1 2s. and £1 7s. 6d. costs the same as sawn timber?—No, one is 14s. 6d., and that is a lower-grade timber. Dressing lines cost us 8s. 6d., f.o.b.

135. So that 8s. 6d. is the maximum price at the port of sale from your wholesale men?—I am speaking of ordinary timber when I say 8s. 6d.—that is, ordinary dressing-timber. Of course, some timbers cost more if they are wider or longer.