

87. Is it not a fact that where forests have been largely denuded of the bush the effect of the rainfall has been disastrous instead of beneficial?—I have heard it stated very positively but I do not give it as my opinion, that the bush has nothing whatever to do with the rain, but that the rain zone has a great deal to do with the forest area. It was said we had no bush worth talking about on the Canterbury Plains, and it was said very positively that the bush existed on the West Coast because it was in the rain area; not that the rain area was there on account of the bush, but the reverse.

88. Is it not a question as to whether or not the bush causes the rain, but whether or not it conserves the rain, and whether the gradual absorption of the water is not a benefit to the farmer and producer? Would it not be much better if the bush and undergrowth was allowed to remain, and be conserved for the special object of benefiting the farming people?—I think that is a very deep scientific subject that it would be very unwise for me as a layman to express any definite opinion upon until I had much more data at my disposal to deal with it.

89. So far as the experience of other countries is concerned, would you be prepared to accept and recommend this Commission to accept the opinion of men, or specialists who have been appointed by the Government, to report on these matters, and especially where they have reported in the direction I have indicated?—I should want to see both sides of the ledger first. I have in my mind just now countries where there is no very great rainfall, and they produce some of the best cereals. South Australia has a very low rainfall, and there they have very good products. Still, I do not consider that that is a question that I am at all competent to express an opinion upon.

90. *Mr. Morris.*] You are concerned in the importation of Oregon pine into this market?—Yes.

91. And your experience is that a great deal of it is not dry?—I do not think any of it is really dry.

92. We have been told the timber is dry and that is the reason it is used in preference to our native timbers?—That is not according to my experience—my experience is that it is not dry.

93. In connection with the depression in the sawmilling and building trade, I think if you told the Commission what is the average amount of your purchases from the West Coast mills for the last twelve months, compared with the two years previous, it may be of interest to us?—I have not got the figures for February yet, but I think they are not getting more than 25 per cent. from the West Coast mills now of what they were getting, say, eighteen months ago.

94. Can you also tell us what is the percentage of red-pine fit for dressing and manufacturing purposes obtained from your own mills?—Of course, my mills are an exception.

95. You think your mills are better than any one else's?—Yes, certainly. I should say about fifty per cent. is the most, under favourable circumstances, that you can expect to get. I would also say that, with all bush that is worked that I know of, the timber varies throughout the bush: you may get a very good run of bush and a very poor run. It has all to go to the market, and I should say fifty per cent. is the maximum amount of good clean timber you can get out of red-pine logs.

96. Then, in the event of this foreign timber being admitted into this country free, what are we going to do with the balance of our timber—would it not tend to increase the price of the dressing-material?—I answered that question yesterday. If that timber is not going to be used I really do not see what we are going to do with it, and it must of necessity increase the cost of clean timber very considerably.

97. You told us that you consider it is equal to Oregon in every way for framing purposes and building?—Yes. The only thing I excluded yesterday was long beams and big joists. It is probably lighter to handle, but the tendency in all good buildings in Christchurch is to make them fireproof as far as possible, and therefore they are using steel joists, and hence Oregon is not very much required in Christchurch.

98. In regard to the profits, do you consider, as a sawmiller, that the prices of timber now charged by the West Coast mills are too high?—I do not. I do not think they are enough.

99. Then, of course, as a citizen of New Zealand, you consider it is in our own interests to keep our money in the country and employ our own people?—Yes, I do. I look at it in this way, that if it could be proved to me that the country was going to be benefited by getting other timber to take the place of ours and conserve our forests, then I would be prepared to consider the position, but I do not think that has been proved.

100. You know that on the West Coast there is a tremendous amount of land which, after the present crop of timber has been removed, could be reserved for future timber-supplies?—Yes.

101. *Mr. Barber.*] You are interested in timber-milling?—Yes.

102. You are also looking out for further timber interests?—No, I am not at present.

103. You said you sent a man to Kaikoura to advise you in regard to some timber areas as to whether they were worth going in for?—Yes, but that happened three years ago.

104. But you would not pay a man to report in such a way unless you were looking out for some further interests?—You said "at present."

105. Now, you have been endeavouring to show that thirty-five years ago timber was very high in price, and that it would not be fair to say that timber has gone down?—No, I did not say that. I said it was as fair to say that as to say that there had been an unnatural increase in the price of timber, say, since twelve years ago.

106. Are you aware that twenty years ago timber was being placed on the railway-trucks in Southland at 4s. a hundred feet?—Well, twenty years ago we were not concerned with any timber that was placed in trucks, because our timber was always brought by sea.

107. Do you think it would cost more to place it in a schooner than on a railway-truck?—It depends upon how close the schooner can be got to the mill.

108. Taking into consideration the conditions twenty years ago and now, do you think there would be any difference in the cost in placing the timber on a schooner as compared with a truck?