

and there are a hundred million fewer sheep in the Continent of Europe at the present time than there were thirty years ago. In many part of France they are paying 8½d. to 10½d. for horse-meat. It is not a question of supply and demand at all; there are restrictions of trade which are preventing our getting better prices. Again, in this system of claims for quality and damage, allowances are sometimes made which enable men to undercut others, and that has also an influence on prices. I shall not enlarge further upon that, but come now to the point raised of concentrating your meat in the Old Country. I know that it is felt that some better system of distribution might be adopted there. Whether that is possible or not it is for those more experienced in the trade than I am to determine: it is some ten years now since I was actively engaged in the trade in England. We have it from a gentleman speaking here that he considers regulation rather than control is essential. But during my time in the Old Country, ten or twelve years ago, I was much impressed with the unsatisfactory condition of the selling of meat at that time, and I thought it necessary to establish some centre through which the produce of New Zealand should go. You will remember that in those days the system of selling meat on the Smithfield Market was to place it in the hands of salesmen charging 2 per cent. No doubt much of the parcel reached the ordinary value, but it was sold often in dribbles, and great dissatisfaction resulted. It was contended that the whole amount obtained for the sale was not credited to the vendor. Be that as it may, I did not do much trade on those lines. Afterwards I followed the line of selling my meat *ex ship* c.i.f., and nominally I obtained for the people here the market value. I use the word "nominally" advisedly, because owing to the system of claims we often had claims for quality as well as damage, and the rates were correspondingly high and the returns lessened. There was great difficulty in getting for my clients the values I thought satisfactory after deductions were made, and it appeared to me that some central place was necessary to dispose of New Zealand meat. I searched about, and there was a site of 18,000 sup. ft. near Smithfield, and the Metropolitan Railway connected it with the docks. I submitted a scheme I had carefully thought out, which I believe would have placed our meat trade on a satisfactory footing, and have brought a satisfactory return from the investment. I laid that scheme before many men travelling Home from New Zealand; but not one, with the exception of Sir John McKenzie, gave it any attention. He was very enthusiastic, and said that if I came out to New Zealand I should have means placed at my disposal to carry out the scheme. Unfortunately, Sir John's health was not restored, and other circumstances arising, the scheme fell through. Still, I have information as to places where the meat can be well held, and the full results brought out to the people here. The question was raised by Mr. Kettle and by Mr. Hampson regarding the ability of the Old Country to continue to receive the increasing quantities of frozen meat produced by New Zealand. Mr. Kettle thought the six million (it is a little over five million really) might be increased to ten million, and our friend from Nelson stated that he was quite satisfied that the Old Country could take a very great deal more, and he gave us the humorous story about the man saying that our shipments might fill only one shop. Now, my opinion is that we have pretty well reached the normal consuming-capacity of the Old Country at the present prices. I think that ten million carcasses is about the limit, because we exceeded that, and we know the result. But what have been the increasing amounts that Great Britain has been receiving in the shape of frozen meat? In 1904 her total imports were seven and a quarter million carcasses; in 1908 they were over nine million carcasses, and in 1909 over eleven million carcasses—an increase of nearly four million carcasses in a little over four years. And our other markets are not as good as they were formerly. South Africa took a great quantity from the Argentine and Australia; but that has almost entirely ceased. In 1904 it took from the Argentine—I think it was—over six hundred thousand carcasses, or thereabouts, and now it is down to ten thousand; and from Australia there is a decrease, but not so great. Now, the point one emphasizes there is this: If we can from New Zealand, from our twenty-four million sheep, send more than half the normal quantity of sheep to Great Britain, where are we to be in the face of the Argentine and Australia, with flocks aggregating six or seven times what we have—something like 165 million sheep? I therefore think that the outlook for the frozen-meat trade under present existing conditions is not too bright. We, of course, know that if there is great industrial development at Home, there will be a greater consuming-power—but before I deal with that let me mention a point in connection with the grading. Although there are not perhaps now so many claims for "not up to quality," it is an undoubted fact that in many instances has been brought about by freezing companies refusing to sell; and I know it is a serious fact in connection with our dairy-produce that they have succeeded in introducing a clause which allows them to determine the value by Home arbitration; and that is an exceedingly unsatisfactory thing. I now come to an important point, which has been very much touched upon at this meeting, and that is the question of damage, which Mr. Ewan Campbell has asked me to deal with. My friend Mr. Kettle stated there were firms at Home combating it. I hope there are. Mr. Vavasour stated that it was impossible to sheet it home, but during my experience in the Home market I did not find such a great difficulty sometimes in sheeting home the real position. Mr. Chamberlain said that if we solved this matter we should have done a very great deal of good. We were told by Mr. Turnbull that the conditions were very much altered; and yet we have it from Mr. Lysnar that 12 per cent. of the mutton their freezing companies are sending Home is assessed as damaged, and that there is little against which damage is not claimed. Regarding the question of insurance rates: Eleven years ago cover could be obtained at 45s., although in some instances there was a higher rate charged. I know myself of a cover made for £25,000 at 45s. If this question of damage is being rectified, what justification have the insurance companies for increasing their rates from 45s. to 50s., and to 65s.? Here we have a state of things emphasizing unsatisfactory conditions with regard to the claims made on frozen meat. To illustrate this I shall give half a dozen examples of a varied nature within my own experience. First,