

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

WEDNESDAY, 6TH SEPTEMBER, 1911.

GEORGE SHIRTCLIFFE examined. (No. 1.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What are you?—A merchant in Wellington.

2. Will you make a statement to the Committee?—Well, sir, I would just like to say that the delegation in waiting before you this morning desire to have it made clear that they are not acting in any sort of antagonism to the Bill. If the Parliament of the country thinks that such a Bill is necessary they are quite willing to do what they can to put forward suggestions that will make the Bill as workable as possible. The object this morning is rather to point out what, in their opinion, are the weaknesses of the Bill, and to make suggestions which will, in their judgment, remove those weaknesses and make the Bill a practical measure for the protection both of the seller and the buyer of the seeds. What I would propose, sir, with your permission, is just to take the clauses as they come in order in the Bill, and explain as briefly as I can the suggestions we should like to put forward. In regard to clause 1, we should like to know or have it made clear whether the Bill is to apply to sowing in New Zealand only, or whether it includes seed for export. There is a large amount of export trade done, which is a growing trade, and the exporters from New Zealand have, of course, to be controlled and guided by the regulations that are in force in the importing country to which they ship the seeds, so that we take it it is not the intention of Parliament to make this Bill apply to seeds sold for export. That is one question we would like to ask, sir—if we could be informed as to what the intention is. We think the Bill should be confined in its operations to the internal trade of the country.

Hon. Mr. T. Mackenzie: That is the intention.

Witness: Well, we are quite satisfied upon that point. Then, with regard to clause 3 of the Bill, we take it, sir, that the Bill is not intended to apply to transactions between merchant and merchant or trader as distinct from transactions between traders and growers. We consider that there ought to be no restriction at all placed on transactions between traders who themselves know all the conditions under which they have to sell the seed when they come to sell it to the growers, so that the intercourse between the merchants should be as free as possible with no restrictions at all; but where it comes to selling the seed to farmers for growing, then we are at one in thinking that some kind of measure is necessary, but we ask that it should be made quite clear that the Bill should not apply to transactions between merchants or traders.

3. *Mr. Field.*] I suppose there is a large volume of that business done in the country?—Yes, a very large volume of business is done, and if the conditions of the Bill were to operate as between merchant and merchant I am sure it would render the business almost impracticable.

4. *Mr. Dillon.*] You mean the producer and the merchant?—No. We want to have it made quite clear that this Bill only applies to transactions between the seller and the grower, and not between trader and trader. If I as a merchant find myself short of white clover I may want to buy it from another merchant, and he should be free to sell it to me without any reference to the Bill. If in turn I want to sell it to the grower, then I am restricted by the operations of the Bill, and we do not object to that; but we say, let the transactions between merchants be entirely free, and not controlled in any way by the Bill. We rather thought that was the intention, and we were hoping that you would be able to tell us whether that was the intention or not. I now pass on to clause 5 of the Bill, dealing with the particulars in reference to the certificate, and we should like to say that, in our opinion, this clause is going to be most harassing to the retail trade; in fact, it seems to us that it will be impossible for retailers to issue a certificate for each parcel of seed that they may sell. We have in some of the retail trades as many as two or three hundred parcels of seed to be sent out in one day, ranging from 5 lb. to 15 lb. in weight. As a matter of fact, how is it possible for retailers to issue a certificate with each packet of seeds? We say the impracticability of the suggestion is so manifest that we feel sure the Committee will recommend some modification of it. We put forward this suggestion: that the minimum quantity provided for in the first paragraph of clause 5 should be 5 cwt. and not 5 lb., and that it would be a fair thing to require a certificate, when demanded by a buyer, for a quantity exceeding 5 cwt.; but we say that to ask each retailer to furnish a certificate with every 5 lb. of seed he puts up can hardly be considered. Then, we should like to ask, sir, that the certificate need not be given unless asked for. We take it that this certificate will not really be wanted, and not even thought of in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, and that the buyer will only ask for the certificate if he has some reason to think that there is a doubt about the quality of the seed; and we do not think the vendor should be put to the enormous labour and cost of making out these certificates unless they are asked for. If the buyer demands the certificate, then we have no objection, and he has a right to have it; but we say, as a matter of practice the buyer will not ask for the certificate once in a hundred times. Then, with regard to the form of the certificate, we would suggest that that should be embodied on the face of the invoice in some manner as may be convenient to the merchant, and that it should not be necessary to have a separate document. I do not think there could be any objection to that. Then, with regard to the subclause (f) of clause 5, we ask, sir, that "locality" and "country" should be struck out. Clause 5 says that in the certificate it must be shown "the locality and country, and the year, in which each kind was harvested." We say, so far as locality and country are concerned, in nineteen cases out of twenty it is simply impossible to give the information, and the word "unknown" would have