

86. You say there is a difficulty in knowing the country from whence the seed comes. You buy largely from London?—Both London and local.

87. And have you no idea where the seed is grown?—No, very often not. In most cases I should say the seed is bought on cable. We have samples sent out to us by mail, and then we cable Home ordering on the samples. We are sufficient judges of seed to say whether the particular sample is going to suit our trade or not. We do not know where the seeds are purchased, and I should say more often than not the vendor at the other end does not know.

88. Your agent at Home should know?—No.

89. I was in the seed trade there for a time, and the agent usually knew where it was grown?—They may sometimes, but I am quite sure not always.

90. Well, as to the question of samples being drawn, I know that is a difficult matter, and realize the truth of all you have said. We will endeavour to meet that as far as possible?—Thank you.

91. Regarding the sale of rib-grass and Yorkshire fog, of course those seeds can be sold. Under the Bill, of course, they come within the clause "unclean," but there is no prohibition against the sale of them?—Well, if that is made clear.

92. It is. No seed is prohibited from being sold, only you have to say whether "clean" or "unclean"?—But surely it is an anomaly. If I may be allowed to state again, you prohibit us from selling Yorkshire fog in, say, rye-grass, and yet we can sell Yorkshire fog as a weed.

93. If you mark it clean, but when there is 25 per cent. it is unclean. You can sell Yorkshire fog so long as it is marked unclean?—But in selling Yorkshire fog must we sell that as unclean seed?

94. Yes. The Act might perhaps be made clearer and provide that Yorkshire fog and rib-grass can be sold as such, and clean if it does not contain a larger proportion of weed-seeds than applies to the others?—That would be quite satisfactory to us.

95. Now, in regard to the publication, you say it may mean ruining a man's business. First of all, you would not suppose that the Government, unless it was a very flagrant case, would publish; but you know in connection with fertilizers that is the law now—you can publish the name of any merchant who sells that which is not up to what his certificate professed?—But two wrongs do not make a right.

96. But it is not a wrong, because you may be aware there is a very great variety in fertilizers, and some merchants have sold very far from their certificates?—That may be so.

97. In Maine it is published regularly, and it is remarkable what it does for the good man?—Yes.

JAMES ERSKINE WATSON examined. (No. 2.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What are you?—A general merchant at Invercargill.

2. Will you make a statement to the Committee as to how you think the proposed Seeds Control Bill would operate?—Well, Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, I would just like to say that the matter has been very fully dealt with by the previous witness, Mr. Shirtcliffe, and I feel it would be unnecessary to take up much of your time. I would like, however, to draw your attention to the fact that the deputation which is here present represent the leading members of the seed trade at all the principal centres from Auckland to the Bluff. Naturally, as this Bill affects the conduct of our business it has engaged our very serious attention, and we have had meetings at the various centres—namely, Auckland, Palmerston North, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin, and Invercargill. Since then we have also had an opportunity of speaking together here in Wellington. The suggestions for amending the Bill which have been detailed by Mr. Shirtcliffe have been unanimously agreed to by all the members of the deputation, representing, as I say, practically the seed trade throughout New Zealand. A copy of the suggestions of the deputation will be handed in to the Committee, and I have no doubt you will find them to be very useful.* I should like to confirm what Mr. Shirtcliffe has said as to the attitude of the firms engaged in the trade with regard to legislation on this question. We all realize that there may be and are abuses in the trade that require to be checked if possible, but the one thing we desire to obviate is the passing of any legislation which will make the trade difficult for the honest merchant, because it follows that if the conditions of the trade are made unduly severe in the long-run the trouble caused will fall on the shoulders of the farmers, because the expenses of conducting the business will be increased to such an extent that it simply means the farmers will have to pay a good deal more for their seed. The principal feature in the Bill, of course, which members of the seed trade regard as serious is clause 6, which deals with the taking of samples; and what we feel is that it would be an unwarrantable assumption to suppose that every farmer is scrupulously honest. I might say that, so far as my experience is concerned, extending now for a quarter of a century, in the business of dealing with farmers and squatters, it is that the majority of them are perfectly honest men, who would not take advantage of anybody; but myself and other have come in contact with certain individuals who would be only too glad to take advantage of any one, and no merchant should be placed in the position of being at the mercy of some unscrupulous person. In regard to the examination of seed, we are quite prepared to have any examination you like made by any responsible persons so long as it is within our own control; but after the seed passes from our own control and goes away into the country, in some cases hundreds of miles away, we feel that it would be grossly unfair that the farmer should be allowed to draw a sample from that seed, and that on that sample drawn by the farmer, in the absence of the seller, the seller's reputation may be made or marred. If a farmer had a disagreement with a merchant—and such a thing is not unknown in business—what would hinder him, if he got a parcel of seed from that merchant and wanted to do an unfair thing, gathering a few Californian-thistle seeds and scattering them amongst the seed, and then bringing it before the notice of the Biologist and

* For suggestions see end of Mr. Watson's evidence.