

or small, makes no difference to the pay of the men. We are therefore not going to throw away any fish that can be converted into money. At Home the trawlers are mostly worked on the share system, but we cannot do that here. We tried it here, and for a week the men had a good time. Then there came a bad week and I had to come to the rescue and find coal.

58. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] You say that the men limit the catch in order to regulate the market?—The whole idea is that there are days when there are no steamers in at Port Chalmers. If they did not have some such regulation the lumpers would get into a boat on an off day and there would be a slump in the market for fish.

59. It seems to me that the boats are working into the hands of the trawlers?—It is a different class of fish altogether.

60. *Mr. Veitch.*] How does it pay you to sell all you catch whilst it is necessary for the boats to limit their catch?—I have no control over the fishermen, but I have over my own business. It pays me this way: I have to pay £80 per week expenses, and if I can get £20 worth of fish for nothing I am going to have them. It would be very foolish for me to throw away any fish I can utilize. As regards the other men, they earn very good money. Last week several of the hook-and-line men had been paid £10 per man for fish caught during the week.

61. Can you give us a fair idea of the retail price of fish?—This last week fresh groper was selling at 30 lb. for 7s. 6d. You can go into any of the fish-shops and get groper for 4d. per pound.

62. Flounders?—Average size, say, 3s. a dozen up to 8s. a dozen.

63. Is that an average week?—No, it is a dear week; but the groper is cheap for this time of year.

64. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] Which fish has the largest demand, so far as the public is concerned?—Blue-cod.

65. Which fish do you sell most of?—Groper.

66. What next?—Red-cod.

67. What were red-cod worth last week?—About 10s. a cask, weighing 1½ to 2 cwt.

68. Is that high, normal, or low?—It is about a normal price. Sometimes a cask costs £1, sometimes 5s. The long and the short of the whole thing is this: we are all living at a higher standard than formerly. People who used to be satisfied with ling, and red-cod, and barracouta now want blue-cod, flounder, or soles.

69. *Mr. Macdonald.*] You think the standard of fish-consumption has risen?—Undoubtedly; and more than that, the consumption of fish has risen.

70. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] But groper is still the fish of which most is sold?—Yes.

71. *Mr. Robertson.*] And red-cod next?—Yes, because they cannot get the other.

MICHAEL O'DONNELL, Furniture-dealer, &c., examined on oath. (No. 4.)

1. *The Chairman.*] In what line do you propose to give us your experiences?—I was for thirty years in the produce line.

2. Go back twenty years and let us know what the prices were at that time?—There is no doubt that various commodities were cheaper twenty years ago than they are now; but the conditions were far worse than they are to-day. Wages were very low then; in fact, there was little or no work to do for numbers of men. I know that contracts were sometimes taken at ruinous prices. Many contractors could not pay their men. There was no law to protect the working-man and compel the contractor to pay him. Now that is provided for.

3. You assume that the low price of produce at that time was owing to the bad times?—There is no doubt that more produce was produced then than could be consumed, and a good deal went to waste. At the same time, we will say in the winter season, farm-produce would rise and fall according to the crops. It is a question of the season more than anything else. A lot of people do not understand it. For instance, supposing potatoes go up to £10 a ton, they fancy that it is a ring that is causing it. It is simply because they are not in the country very often. I have known cases where potatoes have gone up to £10 a ton, and it would have paid the grower the year before to sell them at £3 a ton. The year before they went up to £10 a ton they had only about 30 cwt. to the acre. In the previous year they had from 8 to 10 tons to the acre. When the crops are very light it takes a great deal more labour to get a sack of potatoes. So far as farm-produce is concerned I cannot see how any Commission can alter the position so far as that affects the market. No one can prevent the farmer from holding his produce back if he likes to hold it back for a higher price. Sometimes farmers grow stuff which it does not pay to sell. The high prices are owing to the scarcity of the article in many cases. I remember about six or seven years ago farmers sending in their potatoes to this market, and they put such high reserves on them that the agents had to stack them in the stores. Victorian potatoes were then sent in to the New Zealand market at a low price. The result was that the locally-grown potatoes had ultimately to be sold at a great sacrifice, as they had begun to grow in the sacks.

4. Do you assert that the higher price of potatoes at the present moment is owing to the scarcity and not to the competition?—I suppose it is owing to the demand. The wholesale price is not very high: it is about £4 per ton.

5. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] What is the weight of a sack of potatoes?—The sacks are of various sizes. There are 4-, 4½-, and 5-bushel sacks.

6. What is the average?—1 cwt. 3 quarters.

7. *Mr. Macdonald.*] What line are you in now?—In the furniture line.

8. *Mr. Robertson.*] How long is it since you retired from produce-dealing?—Five or six years ago; but I take an interest in it still.