

33. Is it within your knowledge that if the market was free you could buy many of these commodities at, say, 10 or 15 per cent. better than you are doing now?—Yes.

34. Who would get the benefit if you were able to buy in a free market, as you did some years ago?—In regard to Colman's goods the selling-price was fixed, and it was pointed out to us that we were getting a better price under the new arrangement than under the old.

35. What are you paying for Colman's mustard at the present time?—4s. 6d. for quarters and 8s. for halves.

36. Is it not 8s. 6d.?—No.

37. Have they altered the tariff recently? What is it for ones?—16s.

38. Before that scale came into existence could you buy Colman's mustard cheaper?—Yes.

39. How much, approximately?—From memory, 4s. 3d. and 7s. 3d.

40. And for ones?—14s. 6d.

41. You have to pay 1s. 6d. more for ones now—a difference of 10 per cent.?—Yes, practically.

42. A condition of buying Colman's mustard is that you must charge a certain retail price for it—you have to adhere to that price?—Yes.

43. If you bought mustard at 14s. 6d. instead of 16s., would the public get the benefit?—Yes, we could sell it at 1s. 4d.

44. *Mr. Macdonald.*] Do you think the rise in prices is due to competition or to the natural cause of demand and supply?—The impression among grocers is that it is due to a combination. I may say that matches are being reduced now because a new class of matches is being brought out.

45. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] In connection with the prices you are quoting for mustard, had you not better verify them from the price-list?—I am speaking from memory. I will verify them, and let you have the exact figures.

46. Is it within your knowledge that the Merchants' Association of Dunedin has ever used a threat not to supply a man unless he sold at a particular price?—They have never threatened me.

47. You say there is a scale of prices at which Colman's goods must be sold to the public. Is there any threat behind it to stop supplies?—They would certainly use their influence to prevent it.

48. But you have no knowledge of that ever having been done?—No, I have no knowledge.

49. *Mr. Macdonald.*] The agent fixes the selling-prices of Colman's goods?—Yes.

50. What is to prevent you selling at a lower price than the price fixed?—Who could sell retail at a lower price per tin?

51. *Mr. Hall.*] You spoke about a cutting grocer just now. Would the wholesale merchants continue to supply a man who was cutting prices—selling at prices below which it was possible to make a living?—They would not supply them with lines they have control of.

52. *Mr. Macdonald.*] I cannot see from your answer where your complaint comes in. If they fix the selling-price at the only price at which you can retail with a profit, there is no harm to you and no harm to the public?—I think the selling-price is fixed to us too high. If the lines were bought in the open market, we should be able to sell the lines cheaper than we do now.

53. You buy a line at 4½d. and retail it at 5½d.?—If we could buy the line at 4d., we should certainly sell it at 5d.

54. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] The duty on mustard was 2d. per pound prior to the last alteration in the tariff. That duty has been removed. Has there been any alteration in the retail price? Has the public got the benefit of that remission of duty?—No; there has been no reduction in the retail price.

55. *Mr. Macdonald.*] There are a number of articles on which the tariff has been reduced?—Yes.

56. Can you from memory enumerate some?—Fruits—currants, raisins, and sultanas.

57. Who has got the benefit of that reduction?—It is difficult for us to say. The prices of currants, raisins, and sultanas are the same now as when the duty was taken off. The increase in the price of sultanas from Smyrna has been very great. I understand there was a poor crop. Next year, if the crop is larger, they may go back 2d. It is a question of supply and demand.

58. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] There are other lines which have been affected by the tariff. For instance, Neave's Food carried a tariff of 20 per cent. What is the present price of Neave's Food?—10d.

59. Since when?—We always retailed at 10d.

60. It was 11d. in 1892?—Yes, we used to get 11d. for it.

61. What do you pay for Neave's Food at the present time?—9s. 6d. That is the scale rate.

62. Can you give us a list of the lines that are controlled by the Merchants' Association of Dunedin?—I could give you a list of the majority of the lines.

63. The principal lines?—Yes, we would be glad to do that. Practically all lines are controlled. Rice, sago, and tapioca are not controlled by them.

64. I will name a few: Highlander milk?—Controlled.

65. Neave's Food?—Controlled.

66. Tobacco?—Controlled.

67. Fry's cocoa?—Controlled.

68. Bournville cocoa?—Controlled.

69. Van Houten's cocoa?—Controlled.

70. Tobacco?—Controlled. The majority of the leading lines are controlled. The good selling lines are generally secured by a wholesale merchant; he has the agency.

71. Generally, the object of the Merchants' Association is to fix the prices, assuring themselves a definite profit on all the goods they handle, and eliminating competition: is that the fact?—Yes, that is so. We are simply told by a traveller, "You might as well give your order to me as to the other fellow; we are all the same."

72. As to Colman's goods, is it within your knowledge that the price of the merchants has not altered for twenty years?—I have no knowledge of that.