

18. Do you import fruit from other centres?—Not to any extent. I could not say that I am an importer.

19. Most of the fruit sold in Dunedin is locally grown?—That is New Zealand fruit, of course.

20. Do you know the price at which imported fruits are landed in New Zealand?—It fluctuates. Just now the people who are importing mandarins are losing money on them.

21. You buy from the wholesale importers?—Yes.

22. Have you any reason to believe they are making undue profits?—No.

23. Have you any reason to believe that there is any combination amongst them to regulate the price?—I may have a slight idea, but I am not in a position to say that there is.

24. You think there is, but you are not prepared to say definitely?—That is so.

25. Is there any combination amongst the local retail fruitgrowers?—Not that I know of. There is an association that at certain times of the year sell fruit at fixed prices.

26. What are the objects of the association?—To guard their interests and see that they get the best price going.

27. Is it your opinion that if this association did not exist fruit would be selling cheaper in Dunedin?—I do not think so. It only applies at certain times in the season. The association I refer to is the Teviot Association.

28. Who are the members of that association?—It is composed of a number of fruitgrowers around Roxburgh. They have an office in town. We can buy from the association if we wish. This year I bought their stuff in the auction-rooms at 1d. a pound less than they were wanting for it. I do not think they are keeping up the price. It cuts out the middleman to a certain extent. They sell direct to the public.

29. Is there any association to regulate the fruit-retailers?—No.

30. They compete against each other openly, without any agreement as to price?—Almost all the time—that is so.

31. *Mr. Hall.*] Are they producing more fruit in this district than the market can consume?—Yes; fruit of a kind. During the latter end of February and in March and April there are more apples, plums, and pears than meet the demand. Then a little earlier there are peaches, apricots, and so forth. Otago-grown fruit is sold as far north as Wellington.

32. Is there a glut of fruit just now?—Yes.

33. What would apples sell at per case when a glut was on?—I have seen fairly good apples go at 1s. per case.

34. What particular kind?—They would be a mongrel kind. It is the kind of fruit you hear the growling about on the part of the farmers.

35. What would be the value of these cases?—3d. for the cases, railage 6d., and then there would be 10 per cent. commission.

36. Sold at 1s. per case, the farmer would barely get expenses?—That is so.

37. Do you think there is much fruit not sent to the city for fear of not getting sufficient to cover expenses?—At times it might be so.

38. Supposing the auctioneer put up a line of 100 cases and knocked them down at 3s., does the man to whom they were knocked down take the whole lot, or only what he wants?—It depends.

39. Do they ever put up the lot and the highest bidder says, "I will take thirty cases"?—Yes.

40. And is the balance put up again?—Yes, and very often it fetches less than the first buyer paid.

41. In times when there is a glut is any of the fruit bought and put into cool storage?—Not very much.

42. Is there much loss on fruit that goes into cool storage?—There is a fair amount of loss.

43. Do you know the cold-storage rates here?—No.

44. Do the retail fruiterers buy direct from the farmer to any extent?—Not a great deal.

45. Do you think they would get better prices if more fruit was sold direct to the retailer?—No, I do not think they would. They would get a fairer price, I believe. It is far better for us retailers to buy in the auction-rooms. The fruit is there open in front of us, and we see just what we are buying. If you buy off the private man, with the exception of a few, you cannot depend on their stuff: it is not graded.

46. If they had a good system of packing and grading would they do better if they dealt with the retailer direct?—No, I do not think so.

47. Is there any fruit sold in Dunedin by hawkers?—Any amount. There are no men going about the city with barrows, but there are any amount of men going around with carts. I started with that myself.

48. How many fruit-auctioneers are there in Dunedin?—There are really five.

49. Do they all deal with imported produce and imported fruit?—Yes. They go in for all kinds of farm-produce.

50. They are all in active competition with each other?—Yes.

51. They have no combination?—They have an association, but as far as I am given to understand that is merely to guard themselves against loss, by being able to know who are the good marks and who are bad marks. That is, I think, as far as their association goes.

52. As far as you know the trade is open and competitive?—Yes, except occasionally they may combine to get a given price. A man may import, say, potatoes, and they will fix the price at £10 a ton, say.

53. The auctioneers will fix the price?—Yes, on goods they have imported. Of course, you must understand that when any of these men import any of the side lines he is pretty careful to get them in when no one else has them.

54. *Mr. Macdonald.*] Can you give us an idea of the proportion that the locally grown fruit bears to the imported fruit of the same class?—I suppose, in apples, they are about equal.