

2. Has your experience been considerable in this district?—I was born here, and I have been in the grocery trade all the time.

3. Are you fully acquainted with the system under which sales are regulated in Dunedin?—Yes, my trade is principally amongst all the smaller storekeepers.

4. It has been alleged that in respect to a certain list of groceries there is a combination in restraint of trade in Dunedin: could you make a statement in regard to that subject?—There is no combination. They have got an association and a secretary of their own. There are a few lines tarified.

5. Is that association a registered association?—I should fancy it is. Our association is registered.*

6. *Mr. Macdonald.*] Under the Classified Societies Act, or how?—I think it is under the Industrial Act. I send a return to Wellington every year. I have not seen any articles of association.

7. *The Chairman.*] Is it within your knowledge that there are such articles?—My principals belong to that association, but I do not know.

8. Is it within your knowledge that they sit as a board, with the retail grocers coming before them?—No. I have been working for the master grocers since 1909, and on one occasion we met them on account of the trade we thought they were doing amongst boardinghouses. The retail section objected to it. We waited on them, and they met us in regard to that matter—and selling small quantities of tea. They met us very well and stopped all that.

9. Could you tell us the names of some of those who were present representing the Merchants' Association?—W. Scoullar and Co., P. Wilson, J. T. Haslett, Neil and Co., Wilson Bauk, W. Taylor, and Tucker and Co.

10. Would they represent pretty nearly, in your idea, the association of merchants?—Yes. On the other occasion we met them with the idea of getting the price of eggs fixed up from week to week—that the price fixed, say, on a Wednesday should be the price for the whole week; but we were not successful in getting that. It was the produce people who asked us to do that. The constant variation in the price of eggs was very disastrous to trade. Sometimes there was a drop of 6d. and sometimes there was a rise of 2d. or 3d. They did not see their way to fall in with out request. The merchants would not charge a commission to country customers. The position is this: that eggs come down from the country to these merchants, and they simply credit the account of the country customer with them. They do not charge a commission.

11. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] They practically take the eggs in payment of accounts so far as the country storekeepers are concerned?—Yes, and it cuts in against others in the produce trade. Those are the only two interviews the master grocers have had with the merchants.

12. *The Chairman.*] Would the proposition that you made have had the effect of making eggs more cheap to the general public?—The general public would have had the advantage.

13. And they were denied that advantage by the association?—It amounted to this: that the merchants were not going to charge commission. The brokers said they could not fall in with it.

14. *Mr. Macdonald.*] It would have steadied the price?—Yes, it was nothing for the merchants. It would have meant that eggs would have gone from one week to the next at the same price. At present they are up and down from day to day.

15. *The Chairman.*] Take the general lines of groceries: are you aware that there are certain lines which can only be procured through the Merchants' Association?—I do not think it is quite true.

16. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] Will you swear that Colman's mustard, Keiller's marmalade, and Neave's Food can be procured outside the Merchants' Association and at their tariff?—As far as I know, Colman's mustard is handled by one merchant here—W. Scoullar and Co.; also Keen's blue.

17. Is it within your knowledge that the Merchants' Association has a fixed scale for Colman's goods, Neave's Food, and other commodities, also Keiller's marmalade—and that unless people agree to the selling-prices of those goods they cannot get supplies?—Colman's mustard and Neave's Food are at a tarified price.

18. Do you not also know that unless people agree to these tarified prices they cannot get supplies?—I could not go that far. I do not know that, and I do not think it.

19. We want to find out if there is anything in the retail grocers' association's articles of association to compel people to sell at the rates dictated by themselves: is there anything of that kind?—Nothing whatever.

20. It is quite open and competitive?—Our association was started for the purpose of keeping down bad debts and doubtful accounts. We have not done badly during the last three years, but ten years ago we were making a lot of bad debts. We keep a "black book" of defaulters, and if a man on that list shifts from one part of the town to the other we tell the grocer there about him.

21. *The Chairman.*] In fact, that list is a black list?—Yes. I wait on the master grocers two or three times a week and get their opinions on the different lines. For instance, if Keiller's marmalade goes up in price I tell them that.

22. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] Have you ever known that article to go up in price?—I have been told so. A firm in Dunedin told me so, and, acting on that, I put Keiller's marmalade up recently $\frac{1}{2}$ d. in price.

23. There has been no alteration in Keiller's marmalade for years?—The distributors are getting 7s. 9d. for it, and formerly they were getting 7s. 3d.

24. *The Chairman.*] Is it the fact that you are not paying more to the manufacturers and you are charging more to the public?—You may know more than I do about it, but I got instructions from my firm—they have put the price up.

25. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] They have put the price up, but has the manufacturer put the price up?—There is very little of it sold.

* I have since ascertained the association is not registered.—A.B.M.