

been wanting a good deal of tilling and draining done during the last three or four years, and I have not been able to get a man to do it. There is not a man in our district who will undertake draining for love or money—even at 10s. a chain. In harvest hands there has been a terrible shortage. There are hundreds of acres of crops lying out now that will never be got in through the shortage—I might say thousands of acres, but hundreds of acres, at any rate.

14. In your district?—Yes, there are several hundred acres in my district. They are in stook, and some were never stooked owing to the shortage of labour.

15. *Mr. Robertson.*] You have had an exceptionally wet season?—We have had simply to look at the stuff for want of labour.

16. It comes to this: that you have had few opportunities of getting it in, and when the opportunities occurred the labour was not available?—I had nearly 200 acres of crop, and I had to take it in with two drays, with the assistance of my young sons and an extra man, a carpenter, who stopped his ordinary work to oblige me. I could not get labour.

17. *The Chairman.*] A great deal of evidence has been given to us in regard to the selling-price of produce sent in by the farmers. Do the farmers as a whole recognize that the prices they receive are anything like what they are sold for in the shops—for instance, in regard to fruit, potatoes, &c.?—I know nothing as to what it is sold at in the shops in Dunedin.

18. Do the farmers in your district generally sell through agents?—I have sold through agents and without agents. There is one question which I would like to answer which the previous witness did not answer—that is, as to labour being employed all the year round. There is a great scarcity of ploughmen throughout New Zealand. A good ploughman now gets about 30s. a week and found—from 27s. 6d. to 30s. He must be a medium ploughman who only gets 25s. Sometimes a man who is not well acquainted with horses starts at 25s., but he soon reaches the larger sum.

19. You have not heard of any trust or monopoly with respect to your produce?—No, but there might be a slight combination with respect to the selling of commodities. There is a combination on the part of labour, and there must be a combination on the other side to a slight extent to make the business pay.

20. Do you think the rise in the price of land of late years has affected the cost of what you produce?—It must. I did buy a little bit; but I have had my land for over twenty years.

21. Has the market price of your land gone up in that twenty years?—Yes, too much.

22. *Mr. Veitch.*] Do you think that land is selling very high now?—I think it would be very much better for the farmers if they could get land at £1 an acre. If you give £20 an acre you must find the interest first.

23. *Mr. Hall.*] Do you think the shortage of labour is calculated to reduce the amount of cropping?—Yes, certainly. We had a Farmers' Union meeting yesterday, and I heard five or six farmers saying that they were selling off some of their teams, and intended to reduce their cropping.

24. Were any of the Sedgwick boys sent to your district?—There was one. There were a good many applications for Sedgwick boys, but the Government would not allow them to be brought out.

25. Do you think it would be in the interests of both the town and country if more were brought out?—I think so. I think that the more labour that can be got to develop the country the better it will be for the country. The more exportation of goods that we have the better it will be for everybody. At present we cannot get labour; and if we cannot get labour production must cease; and if production ceases, the want of work will be felt in the towns first, because so much labour will not be required to handle the goods.

26. Is not that true of all businesses—manufactures, for instance?—It would not make a bit of difference if all the manufactories in New Zealand were closed. We have got a big tariff to keep woollen goods out.

27. *Mr. Hall.*] Is there any fruit going to waste in country districts in times of glut because there is no margin after paying the expense of sending it to market?—I believe that fruit has been fed to the pigs in the Roxburgh district. The railage cost is not high, because you can get it sent any distance at 6d. a case. I have heard of fruit being sold at 1s. a case. I have heard of a truck of potatoes netting a penny postage-stamp; but I never heard anything of fruit. The farming industry is a very precarious business altogether. This year we have had a terrible season to contend with. Would you mind my making a statement with regard to the price of mutton and beef? I have made inquiries about the price of sheep and beef. The average price of beef during the past twenty years has been from 2s. 6d. to 3s. per hundred higher, and for sheep about 2s. 6d. a head in twenty years. My opinion also is that if it had not been for the old cows that have been sold off dairy farms it would have been a good deal higher, owing to the shortage of cattle. That is owing a great deal to the want of labour, too; and it has been partly through stations being cut up and the land now being used for dairy-farming and sheep-growing. Ten years ago the price of beef was a little higher than it is now. During the last twenty years there has been very little difference in the price of mutton. I am alluding to the prices that the farmers get.

28. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] This is a reliable estimate in regard to the price of beef and mutton?—Yes, I got it from a very reliable source.

29. If this statement is correct—3s. and 2s. 6d. per head for sheep—it would make a difference of $\frac{1}{2}$ d. per pound in mutton in twenty years; and we know that mutton has been sold at a much greater difference than that?—As a matter of fact, farming is not such a paying thing. Considering the higher price of labour and land compared with twenty years ago, farming does not pay nearly so well now as it did then.