

6. Give us an approximation. Tell us the mode of business—how the timber is conveyed to the purchaser. But first let us hear about the amount of business done in the timber trade, say, ten years ago?—The timber exported to other parts twelve years ago would be about twenty-five million feet.

7. And the local consumption at that time?—I could not say.

8. You have no idea of the output of the several mills?—No, not in regard to local consumption; I have never seen the figures.

9. And what is the export at present?—The export for the last two years—things are very quiet just now—has run from fifty to sixty million feet per annum.

10. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] For the whole of the West Coast?—Yes.

11. *The Chairman.*] A considerable increase, then, in the ten years?—Oh, yes.

12. Have you any idea whether there is a controlling ring or combination affecting that business on the West Coast?—No, I have no such idea. Of course, we do arrange prices.

13. Who are “we”?—My firm is free, but there are plenty of mills that do arrange prices. The West Coast Timber Company arrange prices for their own mills.

14. Is there a great deal of difference between the prices which they arrange and the free mills?—Sometimes there is a little difference—not a great deal; there is no room for much difference.

15. During the time the timber trade has increased in volume has there been much increase in price?—Yes, quite a considerable increase in price.

16. What is the difference in the principal products—rough red-pine, &c.?—We are working under different conditions now. The sales are conducted differently from what they were, going back twelve years, at any rate. We used to sell on the contents of the log basis. We were selling then 5s. 6d. and 6s., as far as my memory serves me: it is a long time back, and I have no records here.

17. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] That is rough timber?—That is on the contents of the log, taking the clean and rough timber together. Merchants at that time took the whole log, and took a considerably rougher class of timber than is being used to-day.

18. That is for rough red-pine you quote?—Yes.

19. *The Chairman.*] What is the system at the present moment?—Well, the timber is classified, ranging from 5s. for the rough O.B. timber to 7s. 3d. and 9s. 6d. for dressing lines—that is, clean timber suitable for dressing, not dressed timber.

20. *Mr. Veitch.*] Is that the retail price?—That is the wholesale price.

21. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] Where are these prices for?—F.o.b. Westport, Greymouth, or Hokitika.

22. *The Chairman.*] Could you give the Commission your opinion of what has been the cause of the rise of price?—There is from 15 per cent. to 20 per cent. increase of wages during that time. The timber is also further back, in some cases necessitating additional railway freight.

23. The cost of transport has to be added?—Yes, and the timber is also further away from the railway-lines, we have to go further back into the country.

24. Are any mills cutting now that were cutting ten years ago?—Oh, yes.

25. Then those mills are getting the benefits of the prices?—Not necessarily; if a mill has settled in one place for ten years the bush is a long way back from the mill: they then have more cost of logging.

26. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] You consider that wages have increased 15 to 20 per cent.?—Yes.

27. What difference would that make in the cost of production: would it make 1 per cent.?—It would make considerably more than that—oh, gracious, yes!

28. It was proved that the increase in wages has only added $\frac{1}{4}$ d. per carcase in meat?—That would be on the distribution.

29. No, in the cost of producing—slaughtering?—That is not in growing the carcase. And in that case you are only dealing with part of the increase. We are dealing with the whole increase. Timber is largely a question of labour to produce—more than would obtain in the butchery trade.

30. *The Chairman.*] Has any part of that increase arisen from excessive royalty?—The royalty during the period named has doubled. There is also accident insurance thrown on to us, which is a very big thing.

31. *Mr. Macdonald.*] Do you remember the rate?—For bush hands, £4 8s. per cent. on the wages. It is a very big thing. That is an expenditure that has been brought about within the last eight or nine years, as far as my memory serves me.

32. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] You mentioned red-pine suitable for dressing, selected red-pine—what is the price of that when it is dressed?—11s. f.o.b.

33. Is that the highest class of red-pine shipped from the Coast?—No, figured comes in after that—figured timber is 14s. f.o.b. undressed, and dressed 1s. 6d. per hundred extra.

34. *Mr. Veitch.*] There is a difference between dressed timber and moulding?—Oh, yes, a vast difference; and dressed timber does not imply dry timber. The expenses of drying run into more than dressing timber.

35. In the matter of this moulding: do you do that class of work in your mill?—No, not any moulding for export.

36. Can you tell the Commission what is the cost of moulding timber?—What would be the cost if we did it?

37. The selling-price?—They always do it in the cities; they dry it first and mould it afterwards.

38. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] These prices that you are quoting are to-day's prices?—Yes.

39. How long have they been in existence?—Six to twelve months.