

LIGHT RAILWAYS.

Mr. Furkett, Inspecting Engineer of the Public Works Department, was good enough to confer with us in connection with the light-railway system for better facilitating transport in the backblocks. We were also furnished with a copy of the report that he made to the Government on the light railways in Belgium.

Mr. Parry, Chief Electrical Engineer, also gave us some instructive views in connection with the electrification of light railways, but it seems that nothing further can be done in these matters until after the war.

SHIPPING REFRIGERATED SPACE, AND THE PURCHASE OF MEAT-SUPPLIES BY THE IMPERIAL GOVERNMENT.

The shipping question received much consideration, and the Board were represented at the conference which took place in connection with the purchase of New Zealand meat by the British Government, when the whole of our output was taken. There has been little friction in connection with this purchase, and one of the great points which led up to the sale was that if the British Government bought the meat they would take every care to supply ships to carry it. Had it been in private hands these same vessels might have been commandeered for the purpose of carrying troops. There is no doubt, however, that had it been possible to have the whole of our meat taken as usual to the London market the price to the producer would have been somewhat enhanced, but the Board is not aware of any complaint having been made on account of this, the producers evidently realizing that the British Government has been the gainer. At a further conference at which the members of the Board were present new proposals were offered by you on behalf of the Imperial Government at a higher rate than had previously been paid, and at this conference the producers present seemed to be thoroughly satisfied with the offer, and it was accepted by the meeting.

As some dissatisfaction had been manifested regarding the ownership of the meat in store at the end of the war, the Board made representations to the Right Hon. the Prime Minister and urged him to take steps to ensure that, at the conclusion of the existing agreement between the Imperial Government and New Zealand producers to purchase all the meat available for export, the whole of the stocks in store at the conclusion of the war should be taken over by the Imperial authorities and not thrown back on the hands of the owners. We are of opinion that this is a matter which should be pressed on the Imperial authorities, and we would again strongly urge that the Right Hon. the Prime Minister give effect to the representations which have already been made on the subject.

AMERICAN MEAT TRUST.

In connection with the American Meat Trust we had several conferences of a very confidential nature with Dr. Reakes, Director of the Live-stock Division, and much information was supplied by him. The Board is not losing sight of this important matter.

PURCHASE OF WOOL-OUTPUT FOR THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT.

The members of the Board attended the conference which was called for the purpose of receiving an offer from yourself, on behalf of the British Government, to purchase the whole of the 1916-17 season's output of wool. The members present were glad to assist at the meeting, and it is gratifying to know that the arrangements you have made regarding the matter of valuing and paying for the wool are so satisfactory.

WOOL DAMAGED BY PIRIPIRI-SEED.

Representatives of the Board interviewed the Right Hon. the Prime Minister in reference to the quantity of wool lying in Wellington, Christchurch, Auckland, Hawke's Bay, and other centres damaged by "biddy-biddy" (*piripiri*) seed, also as to the quantity of dirty wool which had been passed in at extremely low bids owing to the lack of carbonizing plants, as it was not wanted for the Home trade, and on account of the embargo on the export of wool to neutral and allied countries was absolutely unsaleable. The Board recommended that the Government be asked to allow this dirty and seedy wool to be shipped to Japan or other allied countries where suitable machinery for treating it is available.

GOVERNMENT EMBARGO ON THE EXPORT OF HIDES.

In February, 1916, the attention of the Board was drawn to the fact that an embargo had been placed by the Government on the export of hides, and that as there were only a small number of buyers in the country there was grave risk that the sellers would be at their mercy. This matter was brought before the Hon. Minister of Munitions by our President, who expressed the opinion that if there was any risk of the supply of leather becoming insufficient owing to the export of hides it would be better for the Government to purchase the hides required for the manufacture of boots for the soldiers, and to allow the rest of the hides to be sold in the ordinary way on similar lines to those that had been adopted with regard to the purchase of cheese. The Hon. Minister stated that he was calling a conference, at which the tanners, bootmakers, and exporters were to be represented, and he would be glad if representatives of the producers could also attend; consequently two members of the Board were appointed to do so with Mr. Foster, of the Wellington Meat Export Company. A conference was accordingly held, and, as the representatives of the producers were in a minority, the decision that was come to was very unsatisfactory from the producers' point of view. Subsequently the Board decided to endorse the recommendation of the Council of Agriculture asking the Government to withdraw this embargo, which was a heavy