

JAMES KEIR, representing Messrs. P. and D. Duncan (Limited), examined. (No. 51.)

Of all the secondary industries none are more essential to New Zealand than that of engineering. All the other industries, both primary and secondary, depend on the engineers for their tools of trade and repairs to same. This is especially true of the agricultural and pastoral industries. The agricultural implements necessary in New Zealand are of extraordinary diversity in size and design. Owing to the great variation in our soils and climate, and the diversity of crops and grasses that are grown, there are more different machines required in cultivating the soil and in planting and gathering crops than in any other country in the world. In support of this I have to state that the firm with which I am connected, though we do not attempt to make every sort of machine or implement required, list seventy-five different sorts and sizes of ploughs, 120 sorts and sizes of disk harrows, eleven sorts and sizes of spring-tined cultivators, eleven sorts and weights of tine harrows, fifty-four different sorts and sizes of tripod harrows, 108 different weights and sizes of chain harrows, fifteen different sorts and sizes of cambridge rollers, fifty different sorts and sizes of drills, two sizes of lime-sowers, two sizes of slag-sowers, six sorts and sizes of broadcast sowers, two sorts of windmills, and three or four sizes of each. It is manifestly impossible for any importer to stock such a variety. The importing firms content themselves with about one sort and three or four sizes of the lines in most demand, leaving to the local manufacturers the peculiar lines and the special sizes that may be required. The best agricultural implements in the world are those manufactured in New Zealand. This is largely due to the difficult nature of much of the country to be worked. In South Canterbury and North Otago there is a great extent of down lands more or less steep but of splendid quality. In this class of country American implements are not strong enough, and nothing suitable is made in England. Then along the foothills of Canterbury there is a wide strip of boulder and stony land, much of it literally paved with boulders from 3 in. or 4 in. to 6 in. or 9 in. across. In this country every implement must be special and of extraordinary weight and strength, and nothing suitable is procurable either in England or North America. In the North Island, especially in Auckland, there exists hundreds of thousands of acres of swamp and scrub land waiting to be ploughed and grassed. There is no implement in the world competent to deal with this other than the New Zealand swamp-plough. The importing-houses have now mostly given up the hope of getting into the plough trade, and one of the largest foreign companies, after spending years in endeavouring to make a plough suitable to New Zealand, is now selling a line of ploughs made in Christchurch. In the method of ploughing in the South Island the farmers for fifty years have had the best double-furrow plough in the world, and for the last fifteen years the three-furrow riding-plough and the six-horse team, three in front of three, has become the standard plant. The system of yoking horses in pulley-yokes has been universal in New Zealand since the perfection of the double-furrow plough about forty-eight years ago. This system of yoking is absolutely the best, and is quite unknown in either Britain or America. In Britain they have never got past the single-furrow walking-plough stage—one man, two horses, and one furrow; and on the small and medium-sized farms of North America they have not yet got past that stage either, as is evidenced by the fact that Mr. Henry Ford in making his oil-tractor pinned his faith to a machine to pull two furrows only. In agriculture the plough is by far the most important implement; next to it comes the drill. Though large numbers of American and Canadian drills are imported into New Zealand the turnip and rape sowers for them are made in New Zealand. Turnip and rape are not sown in America or Canada, and they have not, therefore, developed an attachment for the purpose. My contention is that as we make the best implements in New Zealand, more especially the best for the local conditions, why should the local makers not have the advantage of duties such as are imposed in the United States, in Canada and in Australia? If these great nations find duties good for their industries, why should they not be good for us? We are constantly urged to improve our methods; to specialize; to go in for scientific methods and modern plants. If the people of this country want the implement makers and engineers to do these things, then they should see that we get a fair chance. If our competitors are allowed to use the "mustard-gas" of a tariff, how can we be expected to defeat them if we are disallowed the same weapon? For my part, I am ready for free trade with every country that will give free trade to us; but I cannot agree that free trade for the Canadian, the American, and the Australian is a fair thing when they have duties of from 25 to 40 per cent. against our products going into their countries. I want New-Zealanders for New Zealand, and not Americans, Canadians, or even Australians. The free-trade doctrines include this one: that the greater the competition the lower will be the price of any commodity. I want to show you what the result of the advent of the Canadian and American combinations with their own men and their own money in the agricultural-implement line in New Zealand has been. Down till about 1900 the system of selling implements was that the farmer requiring an implement ordered it in most cases direct from the maker, or from his local blacksmith or storekeeper. The various implement-makers fixed prices to return them their required profit on this basis of selling. The American and Canadian firms regarded this as an antediluvian system, and from twenty years ago and since then they set out to show us what modern scientific efficiency amounted to in this department of commerce. This system consists, firstly, in personally canvassing every customer; and in these days it calls for an army of mounted men, the motor-bike "cavalry brigade," to scour New Zealand from end to end every day of the week selling implements. These gentlemen are supposed to be experts, and after they have sold a farmer an implement, and it is delivered, they again mount their "fiery steeds" and set out to see it turn the first sod, and get the farmer—unfortunate or otherwise—to sign what is known as a starting-ticket, certifying that the "contraption" of steel and iron did its work satisfactorily for five minutes, and that the farmer is satisfied with his bargain. When this system was first started