

260. Do you think the number has increased or decreased?—It has decreased.

261. Is it a fact that your trade labours under the disadvantage of a season during which work is slack?—No; we use steam when the weather is bad.

262. Do you speak now of Wellington?—All over the colony, unless in very small yards, where they cannot afford steam.

263. Is there a season when it is impossible to get work to do, owing to the slackness of orders? That comes about Christmas time as a rule. They work into stock-taking, and as soon as stock-taking is over the goods go away.

264. The total amount of lost time in the year when trade is slack is three months?—Yes; in Wellington. In Christchurch, about seven months is the working average. Such a slack time a few years ago in Wellington was unknown.

265. Is it more and more difficult year by year during the last six years to get work?—It is difficult to find work, and boys, as they go out of their time, have to leave the trade. I was in charge of Lightband, Allan, and Co.'s several years, and after I left some of the lads told me they were offered £1 10s. a week after serving six years.

266. Is it not a fact that one or two establishments have been founded since the duty of 6d. was put upon harness-leather?—I cannot say clearly, but in Kaiwarra we have had two sheds built for the express purpose of dressing harness-leather.

267. The question has been raised of the inferiority of colonial leather: would you assign the bad fleshing that is done by butchers and farmers as a rule as a reason why skins are often defective?—Yes; the colonial skins are largely ruined. That question was brought up in Glasgow when I was an apprentice, and the City Council established a large central slaughterhouse, and every animal had to be slaughtered inside that house, and immediately the skin was taken off it was cured. The only remedy would be to have the animals slaughtered in one particular spot. The barbed wire is another source of ruin to the hides, and unfits them for any purpose at all. It handicaps us terribly as against the imported articles, because out of ten hides not one has got a sound skin.

268. Does not branding ruin them?—Yes; they brand on the very best part—the rump and ribs.

269. Is it possible to eradicate these brands in tanning?—No; they are burnt through the skin, and you cannot improve it.

270. When leather of that kind is manufactured the brand comes through on the sole?—It is no use for a first-class article. You cannot put it in for sole, and it seems that some must glory in branding, because the brand is burnt right through into the very bone. It is cruelty to animals.

271. Do you think, if dairy animals were properly cared for in the way they are in the Old Country, and, above all things, skilfully fleshed, it would be an advantage to your trade in bringing out a leather which could compete on equal terms with imported leather?—We could not put it in very high-class harness.

272. You mean to say that there is no inferiority in the skin but what is due to preventible causes?—Yes. The French calf is a very fine article, and the majority is marked "fit" before being killed, and the skins are not broken.

273. Do you think the new fashion of recent years of having tanned leather as uppers has influenced your trade for good or evil?—For evil, because it has done away with the labour; but we do not look upon that as anything great. It is a fashion, and will go away in due course.

274. Do you make any tanned leather?—Both shops here do it.

275. Do you know if it is made in any other part of the colony?—I have not seen any done since I was round. It is worked up into boot-uppers, and a quantity is imported.

276. Do you know what Australia derives from it?—It only goes in as skins, and a large majority will go in as buff and splits.

277. Is any made from sheepskins?—Yes; a great deal, of common quality.

278. *Mr. Hutchison.*] Do you propose a duty on the little cow-skins that come in from India in the raw state, or do you want them free?—Free.

279. *The Chairman.*] You know something about the Indian cattle from which East India kip is made: is it a fact that there is a particular toughness in the hides of these cattle arising from the climate or other cause?—That is so. It is owing to the compactness of the animal, and that is why we do not wish to debar it altogether. It is tough and pliable.

280. Supposing 4d. extra duty were put on, would it enable us to compete with the imported article, and would we be able to make an equally good kip from colonial skins?—The one is a larger hide than the other, and is not so tough as the smaller hide, but if the duty were put on it would give us the advantage of cutting the offal off and of competing with India.

281. *Mr. Hutchison.*] You say the manufacturers having made the leather, they ought to shut up for twelve months and not sell an ounce of it, to give it time for proper tanning?—That I would not like to say. There is no necessity for it lying twelve months. The majority of colonial kip is produced in two months. Another month would make it good leather, but they cannot wait that time. With a tariff they could afford to let it lie until it was properly tanned.

282. *The Chairman.*] You have pointed out three reasons for the inferiority of most colonial skins. Is there not a fourth cause—viz., the fact that immature animals are very often killed?—Their skins, as a rule, never come to us. They are thrown away.

283. You only get the skins of full-grown beasts?—From about 3ft. and upwards.

284. You know there has been a large development in dairy farming, owing to the recent policy of the country: is it not probable that when there is a systematic system of dairy farming we shall be able to get better skins?—We would if some system were adopted whereby the Government could centralise the thing.

285. Is there any difference as regards hides of well-bred cattle? Would they make better leather?—Yes.