

to the farmer for skins and wool, and in the majority of cases he makes 5 per cent. more by selling to me than he would by sending to London. I can ship cheaper than he can. I can save charges which he has to pay. I have no 2½ per cent. commissions to pay; no London charges. I buy the wool myself, and my expenses are scarcely a fraction per cent. I ship my wool and land it in our own store cheaper than he can put it on a wharf in London. I come here and give him that difference, and he gets it every time. During the ten years I have been buying wool in New Zealand—if I had left it alone I would have been thousands of pounds better off. Still, it suits our business to buy forward. If buying here to-day I cable Home, my people sell on the basis I bought at, and, if selling, they cable me, and I buy on the same basis. I had three months in the year for wool business and nine months with nothing to do. I persuaded my people to allow me to buy skins and dirty, unsightly wool, which I otherwise would not have touched. The wool is better for being scoured here. When sent Home dirty it comes out very unsatisfactorily. With regard to tanners, tanners at present are handicapped by the prices of their own material being ruled by outside influence. We cannot buy at our own price. There are always buyers waiting in this market ready to come in if the price of hides or pelts should come in at the prices they want. They export to Europe and America. We are also at a disadvantage so far as Australia goes; they have got lower wages, and they have got a better climate. They have got their tanning materials at hand, and we have to import all ours and pay the duty and other charges, and the cost of leather to the New Zealand tanner is from 2d. to 3d. more than to the Australian tanner; the duty is only 1d. to 2d. I believe if the Australian tanner was to send his leather into this market he could cut us out on most lines. If we have to pay increased charges we have got to buy better, and we have got to take that out of the farmer—or the man who has got the bulk before we get it—and it comes back eventually to the man who grows the stock. I suppose, with the business which we represent, there is perhaps an invested capital of from £100,000 to £200,000. The industry is paying in wages from £30,000 to £50,000 a year, and if this Bill becomes law that amount will be reduced to perhaps £5,000.

80. *The Chairman.*] Will you tell us your opposition to the particular portions of the Bill to which you object, or are you speaking against the Bill as a whole?—As a whole. When I have treated with the hours of work, the penalised overtime, and the holidays I have spoken about everything which can affect us. I do not say there are not any other objections to it. So far as sanitation goes, I think we ought to keep our works in a perfectly sanitary state. I only treat with clauses 18, 19, 30, 32, and 35.

81. Your opposition is mainly directed against them?—Yes.

82. Look at the very last passage in the Bill: you will see that this schedule repeals all the previous factory legislation, so that if this Bill is dropped the others remain?—I have not objection to the others.

83. You are prepared to admit all the holidays?—I have not found them affect me, and I am satisfied. But with this Bill I do say it will be almost an impossibility to conduct business. Though I have one of the most complete plants erected, within four years, I am quite prepared to invest English money if we can get a decent profit. We have not made 5 per cent. since we put it down, but we are satisfied.

Mr. W. H. CLARK, Fellmonger, Woolston, examined. (No. 6.)

*Mr. Clark:* I represent the local industry together with Mr. Hill. I am entirely dependent on the scouring here, and if this Bill becomes law it would really mean I should have to give, say, ¼d. per pound less for my wool, which would come out of the farmers' pocket, or the wool would be shipped in the grease. I have to compete with the English buyer, who buys this wool and ships it direct to London in the grease. If I endeavour to buy at a lower price it practically puts me out of the market. At my particular works at Woolston I do a very large wool-scouring business, and employ from twenty to twenty-five men on the drying-green, and unless we can avail ourselves of all the drying weather it would be impossible to carry on the business, and these twenty-five men would lose their work. On Saturday, say, it takes about two hours in the morning to open out in order to dry, and likewise about the same time to wrap up again the sheets. The consequence would be that it would be impossible to start in the morning, because by the time they had unrolled it would be time to wrap up again, and all that time would be lost. If this Bill became law we could not employ these men on Saturdays, and that would seriously interfere with the other parts of the work. To dry by machinery is not practicable; the business could not be done. The wool-scouring business has to be done in about four months in the year. During these four months I employ about seventy men at Woolston, after which the wool-scouring is over, and we are reduced down to about ten or twelve for the balance of the year.

84. *The Chairman.*] What is the position of these men during the off-season?—They have to find work where they can.

85. You do not claim they earn enough to keep them for the other part of the year?—No.

86. *Mr. Hardy.*] You have shipped wool to England?—Yes.

87. How do your charges compare in New Zealand to those in London?—For the last ten years we should have been better if we had left New Zealand alone.

88. Take this year?—So far as this year goes the wool trade has been in a moribund condition. We are 20 per cent. worse to-day than we were twelve months ago, and from 40 to 60 per cent. worse than twenty months ago.

89. If purchasing wool now, of course, you would save a considerable amount?—No, I do not know that I should. The confidence of the English manufacturer is practically dead.

90. Supposing you wanted wool and were purchasing wool in London, you would save the trouble of buying in New Zealand?—We can buy cheaper to-day in London than we can in New Zealand; the relative prices are dearer here.

91. *Mr. Arnold.*] Do you employ any boy labour?—Oh, we employ one or two for piece-pulling—that is, pulling the wool off pieces we trim off skins.