

FRIDAY, 31ST JULY, 1903.

CAPTAIN PEARSE examined. (No. 3.)

1. *The Chairman.*] Would you prefer to make a statement, Captain Pearse, and then answer any questions that may be put to you, or would you rather have information elicited from you by questions from the Committee in reference to the frozen-meat trade and Mr. Cameron's proposals as embodied in his report?—I would like to say that in all Mr. Cameron's statements he speaks of River Plate and Australian mutton as if they were one and the same thing, or of equal value. I refer now particularly to paper H.—29A. From beginning to end of this report in every instance River Plate and Australian mutton are referred to as if they were of the same quality, instead of which Australian mutton is usually sold at low prices. Very often during the last twelve months River Plate mutton has been sold on level prices with mutton from the North Island of New Zealand. Therefore, it seems to me to be very far from the fact to mix up Australian mutton with River Plate mutton, because you may be led to believe that River Plate mutton is very much below yours in value, while as a matter of fact it is not so low in quality as Australian mutton is below that of River Plate. Mr. Cameron, in his report on "New Zealand Meat-distribution in the Markets of Great Britain" (H.—29A), says, "New Zealand is, comparatively speaking, a small contributor to the total meat-requirements of the British market; therefore it is all the easier to make a speciality of her produce as being of first-class quality and fit for use by the better classes, keeping it ahead and clear from the growing competition of River Plate and Australia." I quite agree with that statement, except that there is no growing competition with Australia. For the next five years Australia must be entirely out of the competition so far as New Zealand is concerned. All we can do in Queensland and New South Wales is to find sufficient mutton for our own consumption.

2. Is there any other general statement you would like to refer to?—No; but I think Mr. Cameron's statement is very sanguine all through, although, of course, he has had a much bigger experience than I have had in the London business.

3. *Mr. Buchanan.*] You have told us, Captain Pearse, that Australian mutton is as much below Argentine mutton in quality as New Zealand mutton is above that of the Argentine?—That is, in the opinion of New-Zealanders; but I say that the best Argentine mutton is as good as your best mutton, and it has been so particularly during the last two years.

4. How long ago is it since you visited London?—Two years and a half. I have a special man in the market who reports to me every month. In his letter of the 12th June last he reports, "The future of the trade is specially difficult to forecast; the situation is complicated by many important issues which may affect values. In mid-July will arrive the first shipment of the new Argentine frigorifico—say, eighty thousand carcasses a month. If the agents of the La Blanca distribute this increased volume of meat without any particular friction being set up, well and good; but if acute competition is created we may see a low range of values for all frozen meats in the autumn. This will be unfortunate for New Zealand, for at that season her exports will be coming in largely reduced quantity, and, with Australia doing practically nil, under ordinary circumstances New Zealand mutton should be worth good prices at the close of the season. At any rate, the Plate possesses the key of the situation, and interest will centre mainly in her operations; her meat arrivals in our autumn and winter will increase enormously in proportion to colonial." Of course, my experience of Canterbury mutton is that everything really good in the shape of lamb is sent away, and I think it is very possible that a very large number of lambs have been used—second-class lambs—to keep up stocks. I think this is the main reason of the late reported deterioration in the quality.

5. You say that the quality of Argentine mutton has been improving very largely of late years. To what do you attribute that improvement—to the improved strains of sheep imported or to improvement in feeding, or to both?—Mostly to the better class of management. Men have gone over to Argentina from Australia and New Zealand who, with the unlimited amount of money available, have made great improvements in recent years. The purchase of the very best breeding sheep and cattle in England during the last five or ten years—the price for good stock being no object—has done wonders.

6. Can you give the Committee any idea of the number of stud sheep—we are dealing with mutton—imported, and the several breeds?—I have not got the figures here, but I have them in the year-book of Argentina at my club, and I shall have much pleasure in sending the book to the Committee if they will return it to me by Thursday next.

7. I have a cutting here from the *Australasian* of February last, in which the following statement is made:—"That in 1899 the imports of pure-bred sheep were as follow: Lincoln, 3,935; Hampshire, 391; Shropshire, 284; Rambouillet, 502; Oxford Down, 74; Leicester, 30; and Mestigo Lincoln, 2,311." Can you give us generally any idea of the numbers or value of stud stock imported into the Argentine?—First of all, I would like to say that the man who wrote that paragraph made this mistake: he gave us the stock in the Province of Buenos Ayres, thinking it was the whole of Argentina. He got very much mixed over it, as it was proved afterwards, in giving the stock from the province only, instead of for the whole republic. Buenos Ayres is only a small proportion of the country.

8. Generally, can you tell us as regards the Argentine—and when I say the Argentine, I mean the whole of South America—can you tell us generally what has been done of late years to improve the native breeds of sheep?—I can give you that exactly from the year-book that I will send you this afternoon. That will give you everything for the last fifteen or twenty years in detail.

9. Have those importations materially improved the character of the mutton?—Yes, wonderfully.