

treating the skins—*i.e.*, the use of a depilatory agent—may have caused some chemical residue to be left in the wool which has led to the combustion. The action of some new sheep-dip is another theory of somewhat similar nature. Samples of wool taken from the ignited bales at the seat of the fire on the 'Gothic' have been secured by the Shaw, Savill, and Albion Company, and submitted for analysis to a specialist."

In the course of a report by the Salvage Association of London on the fire which occurred on the "Gothic" (Exhibit No. 35, p. lxxiii) the following passage occurs: "When the discharge at first commenced we noticed that two bales . . . which had been carried on deck after the fire in No. 4 were still smouldering at the time they were discharged. We lowered these into the water to extinguish the fire, and afterwards opened them, and found that the interior of the bales was badly burned, the wool being charred to a cinder, while the exterior, with the exception of a small hole which had formed an outlet for the fire, had retained its original appearance."

Fleece Wool.—The evidence shows that there is no risk from fire from fleece wool if free from any but its natural moisture. An excess of moisture over such natural conditions is, however, dangerous. This excess of moisture may arise from various causes, such as wool baled from sheep shorn wet, moisture gained in transit during wet weather when the sheeting is faulty, shipment during rain, and loading through the surf.

Your Commissioners are of opinion that although there may be some shearing of wet sheep, yet this does not happen to any great extent, and there is no proof that it is the cause of any of the fires brought under our notice. The experiments conducted by Mr. Burridge (Exhibit No. 40, pp. lxxix and lxxx), in which 18 to 25 per cent. of water was added, convince your Commissioners that where in the case of wet shearing the question in dispute between the station management and shearers is whether or not the sheep are in a proper condition for shearing, the additional unnatural moisture can be present only in a very small degree. This leads your Commissioners to an unhesitating conclusion that it is unlikely that fires have been due to this cause. We are also of opinion that the Railway Department and those concerned with shipping exercise great care, and no case of fire has been shown to the Commission arising from their neglect. Shippers are on the alert to get clean receipts.

Locks, Pieces, &c.—In respect of locks, your Commissioners consider that there is danger of fire taking place spontaneously by reason of the vegetable matter which is frequently left therein and generates heat. Most of this class of wool is treated locally, but a considerable quantity is exported, and in our opinion this exportation constitutes an element of danger.

Slip Wool.—In each case of fire where the cause has been traced, it has been in fellmongered wool, but in the lower sort only—*viz.*, skin-pieces—and this is fully supported by a recent fire in a colonial fellmongery. We do not hesitate in stating our opinion that this class of wool is largely responsible for the frequent fires that take place on wool-laden ships and in fellmongeries. On this matter we may well refer to the report of Mr. R. J. Friswell (Exhibit No. 30, p. iv).

False Packing.

It has come to the knowledge of the Commission that cases of wilful false packing have been discovered, and it is to be regretted that no action has been taken against the perpetrators. Evidence has been given of the packing of low-class wool of dangerous conditions inside a bale containing wool of a superior class.

Skins.

Although no fire has been traced directly to this class of shipment, your Commissioners think that there is undoubted danger, unless the skins are properly prepared for packing and shipment. (See evidence of Captain Rolls, at p. 203.)

Dips.

We have had no evidence to show that any of the dips in use in the colony can be traced directly or indirectly as the cause of fires on wool-ships, and we do not hesitate to free them from any responsibility therefor. This conclusion is confirmed by the investigation of the Government's departmental experts.