

*Mr. George Sheat.*—Does Mr. Makgill wish that this Conference should consist only of farmers' representatives? What good are we going to do?

*The Chairman.*—Evidently he does. However, I put the amendment.

Amendment lost.

*Mr. F. de C. Malet.*—I move that the word "permanent" be struck out.

*Mr. Hall.*—I second that. The word "permanent" was inserted because there was not much prospect of having an annual meeting. I sincerely hope we shall have an annual one. I think we should certainly have some term for the office of the committee, and later on somebody may move that this meeting be convened within twelve months.

*The Chairman.*—I put the motion, That the word "permanent" be struck out from clause 2 of the report of the committee.

Carried.

The Conference then agreed to adjourn the debate until the close of the address by the Minister of Agriculture.

*The Hon. Mr. T. Mackenzie* (Minister of Agriculture).—Mr. President and gentlemen,—Like Mr. Paterson, I thank you for giving me an opportunity of being present. I have had, as you know, in former years the pleasure of taking part in conferences here in connection with agricultural matters, and in that connection I might say that many of the names of those who took part at that time are still on the list of representatives, but it is their sons who are taking their places, and the fathers have passed away. One is pleased to see that Sir John Hall is represented here by his son, and Mr. John Grigg, Mr. Ensor, and many others. It is an indication to us that the work in connection with agriculture is being well carried on by worthy sons of worthy men who have passed to their rest. I now come to deal with some of the points that have been raised—not that I for one moment suppose it is within my power to add much to the excellent information that has been given by those closely associated with the trade. You have been dealing with many important questions and problems that will take the very best ability and the greatest experience to solve, if they are capable of being solved beyond the point reached at present, so far as the industry is concerned. You have the questions of control, of pooling, of the difference between wholesale and retail prices; the question is also raised as to providing increased storage here and at the other end, and also that there shall be a board to dominate prices; the question of insurance also has been raised, and damage claims. I shall in my remarks deal with them as I pass along. The question of the history of the industry has been touched upon, and it is indeed gratifying to New-Zealanders to know that it has prospered to the extent that it has prospered; and one who has watched the development of that industry cannot but feel that those who have been associated with it, both the farmers and the freezing companies, have done noble and excellent work, and the conditions of the distribution on the part of some firms in the Old Country are excellent, no matter what may be said to the contrary. There are freezing companies in this Dominion who have by their close attention to their work developed the industry to an extent hardly possible under any other conditions to develop it. Their grading has been excellent, both as to weight and quality, and therefore any antagonism that might be thought to exist between one section interested in the meat business and another section handling the meat and distributing it should not have a place at any gathering; you are here to work together mutually for the further development of your interests. In 1884, Mr. Thomas Brydone, who was really one of the main founders of the trade, I remember, had a great discussion, and he computed that about 300,000 would be the entire surplus of sheep sent from this country. I wonder what he would say to this last year's figures of nearly twenty times that amount! At that time he said that the London importation was ten million carcasses (or hundredweight); but from here we are sending more than five million carcasses of meat. I believe that I am right in saying that if the frozen meat imported into the Old Country since the establishment of the trade is about 140,000,000 carcasses, this Dominion has sent nearly half of that. It is computed that the freezing-works of the world now are able to turn out no less than half a million tons of frozen meat yearly. I read a very interesting paper by Mr. Critchell, an authority on the subject, saying that the value of the frozen food imported into Great Britain was £338,000,000 sterling. And yet Mr. Brydone and Mr. James Davidson, another worthy promoter, and others in the early days were laying before their friends what they thought necessary to reform the trade, on the basis of a possible 300,000; and it is interesting to find that the very points you are now discussing were the very points they were discussing. Mr. Brydone said on one occasion that the great glut was caused by reason of the irregularity of shipments. And by reason of the same thing last year you got an enormous glut—because in London you received in one month as much as had been exported during the preceding three months. Now we come to deal with the points raised here and at recent meetings. It is held that it is largely a question of supply and demand. Sir George Clifford took that view a little time ago in discussing affairs in connection with the frozen-meat industry. I am not able to take that view of the situation. It seems to me that if we had free trade, free international trade, and supply and demand, there would be an entirely different position in this country at the present time. The free operation of the law of supply and demand is just what does not obtain. Do you mean to tell me that the dominating influence is not held by the meat-brokers of the United States! That is shown by the report of the Commission presided over by Lord Robert Cecil, stating that, although it has not influenced the price in London, it is a fact that that trust is influencing the prices of meat in the provinces. Do you mean to say that we have supply and demand exemplified when we cannot get access to numbers of markets on the Continent of Europe at the present time, in countries which have absolutely consumed nearly three-quarters of their own flocks within recent years! I refer to France and Germany. In Germany in 1873 the flocks were nearly twenty-five million; now they are less than seven million and three-quarters. France in 1873 had thirty-two million, and she is down to seventeen million;