

a bell, so I do not think there will be the slightest trouble. I think the attendance of to-day shows that the Canterbury Agricultural and Pastoral Association were justified in calling this Conference. It is a very representative gathering from all parts of the Dominion which has come here, and they are evidently keen and eager to improve the position of the frozen-meat trade, if they possibly can; and I hope that at the end of the Conference I shall be able to congratulate them on having done some useful work. If the Conference does nothing but talk, it will do good, because it is good for men to come together and talk over what they are interested in, and the frozen-meat trade is very vital to the Dominion. But I think this Conference will result in more than talk. I hope it will lead to concerted action taking place, even if it does not lead to big results in the immediate future. I have a few remarks to make, but I think it would be better to read those, as that will take less time." The Chairman then read the following: "A brief reference is perhaps necessary to the circumstances under which it was considered advisable to convene a meeting of those interested in the meat-export trade. The history and growth of the trade for the present purpose may perhaps be sufficiently recorded by stating that the amount of mutton and lamb exported in 1882 was 1,707,328 lb., valued, at 5d., at £35,000; in 1892 it was 97,636,557 lb.; in 1902 it was 226,904,414 lb.; in 1909 it was 269,773,689 lb., valued at £5,624,342. At the rate at which meat was exported in the last two years, a drop of 1d. per pound meant a loss of something like £1,000,000 to the producers and shippers. From market reports for the past twelve years prices of lamb varied from 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. to 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ d., and mutton from 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. to 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. If an average between those prices were taken we should have lamb 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. and mutton 4 $\frac{1}{4}$ d. The London wholesale prices for mutton and lamb during last season were as follows: February—mutton 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. per pound, lamb 5 $\frac{1}{4}$ d. per pound; March—mutton 3 $\frac{5}{8}$ d., lamb 4 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.; April—mutton 3 $\frac{1}{4}$ d., lamb 4 $\frac{3}{8}$ d.; May—mutton 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ d., lamb 4d.; June—mutton 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ d., lamb 3 $\frac{7}{8}$ d.; July—mutton 2 $\frac{7}{8}$ d., lamb 3 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.; August—mutton 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ d., lamb 3d.; September—mutton 3 $\frac{5}{8}$ d., lamb 3 $\frac{3}{8}$ d.; October—mutton 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ d., lamb 4 $\frac{1}{4}$ d. It appears, therefore, that, owing to the drop which took place, the meat exported realized less by nearly a million and a half than would have been the case had previous average prices been maintained. A large proportion of this loss was borne by the producer in New Zealand, and the balance by the c.i.f. buyers. It is impossible to accurately estimate these proportions, but it appears safe to assume that the farmers in New Zealand sustained a loss of something over £1,000,000. In order to prevent a recurrence of such a drop it becomes necessary to ascertain, if possible, the cause of the drop, and then to devise and adopt such measures as may be desirable and practicable to prevent its occurring again. The circumstances under which the New Zealand farmer markets his meat are such as to preclude his giving personal attention to its sale—unless indeed it is sold in the local stock-markets—in which case the ruling prices are governed by the defective conditions which obtain in the London markets, and the low prices which are fixed as a result of those conditions, and it appears therefore eminently desirable that the farmer should gather as much information as possible for the purpose of enabling him to ascertain whether, when his produce is offered for sale and subsequently disposed of, he gets a 'square and honest deal.' Imagine what was the case last year, when, in their ignorance of the conditions of the English market, and of what their brother farmers were doing, the New Zealand producers consigned their lamb and mutton for sale in London, as they did in May and June last, when in the former month 526,000 carcasses of lamb were sent away, and in the latter 677,000 carcasses, representing a total of 1,203,000 carcasses, as against a total of 640,000 carcasses for the same months of the previous year. No special arrangements were made for the storage of this enormous increase, and the London buyers, being aware of the position, as no doubt they were, found it an excellent opportunity to engage every inch of storage-space available, and then dictate prices to the unfortunate shipper, who had nowhere to put his meat, and naturally no one to whom to sell it. Does it require any great stretch of imagination for us to assume that this is exactly what happened—that the meat was pouring into London, and that the buyers there, with the whole of the storage-space booked, were in a position to dictate prices, and that the shippers were absolutely helpless? And to whom is the blame attributable? Hardly to the astute London buyer, but rather to the ignorance of the New Zealand producer, and to the fact that he has no one to effectively protect his interests at the other end. If the producer is to continue to act in his individual capacity in a similar way in the future, he is hardly to be pitied if he finds that the operation is repeated, and that he is deprived of a fair share of the amount which is ultimately paid by the consumer of the meat. And what is the remedy? That is the question for your consideration. Is it by invoking the assistance of our paternal Government, or is it by applying the blessed principles of co-operation and combination, bearing in mind the fact that the farmers are the people who produce the article on which many of the people not only live but make a living, and that if we combine together we can insure our interests receiving a reasonable and proper consideration? Such a consideration would only mean that our produce should be submitted for sale under such conditions as satisfy us that we are getting a reasonable and fair proportion of what is ultimately paid by the persons who consume it. There are many other points with regard to the methods at present adopted in the selling of meat which have every appearance of being unsatisfactory, and I need only mention such matters as rates of insurance, shipping freights and storage, methods of sale (both here and in London), advices to consumers as to prices and amount of meat in London and in transit, method of discharging from the ships in London, and carriage to the cold-stores. This should satisfy you that there is ample material for consideration to detain you for a far longer period than the two days that have been allotted for the purpose. We have seen this industry worked up from a very small beginning in 1882 to the present dimensions, the second largest in the Dominion. During that time it has quite altered the system of farming, a better rotation of crops has been adopted, and the fertility of the soil maintained by the application of cheap and efficient manures obtained from the freezing-works, and the grazing and feeding-off of rape, turnips, and leguminous crops. Speaking for Canterbury, I can safely say the farms are now in better heart than they ever were