

profit; which simply means that when the yards are not fully going the hands are not fully employed, and in order to compete with the imported article, it would be necessary to have a little extra protection from outside, especially American competition. In Auckland I found that they were much in the same position as Wellington. I always made it my duty in every yard that I called at to first see the manager and state the matter to him. I was everywhere received with open hands and a unanimous opinion—in no instance was a single signature refused to a petition I carried, praying for a readjustment of the tariff on leather, which has since been presented to Parliament by Mr. McLean, bearing 280 signatures. I found in travelling the whole colony that the trade had fallen away considerably. Dunedin ten years ago was larger than it is to-day. I found the following yards in operation: Auckland, 9 yards, 82 hands; New Plymouth, 2 yards, 5 hands; Wellington, 2 yards, 75 hands; Christchurch, 4 yards, 71 hands; Dunedin, 4 yards, 47 hands: thus making a total of 21 yards, and 280 hands. In Dunedin ten years ago there were only two yards, and one of them employed 40 men, whereas the four together only now employ 47 men. I should say that ten years ago 80 men were employed in Dunedin alone, or about 40 men more than at present; indeed, there has been no improvement in the trade anywhere, with the exception of Wellington, which has added an additional tanyard. A leading Wellington leather manufacturer informs me that if the present state of trade continues he would have to ask his men to accept a reduced rate of wages, in order to enable him to compete with the imported article. Taking an average of the total output during the last ten years the result would show little or no increase; whereas during the last ten years the boot-factories doubled themselves, and our trade has therefore fallen back, owing to the employers being unable to manufacture against the imported article. Now, since the tariff of 6d. was put on harness-leather, that branch has shown a considerable increase—that is, where one man was employed before, there are now two. In our own yard there is an increase of five as compared with two. The same is true of Christchurch. The saddlers have not grumbled in reference to this increase of duty. Another piece of evidence that I collected while travelling through the colony was, that some importers had the shoe-manufacturers in their hands, so that the shoemakers were compelled to use the imported article, otherwise they would not take the boots back from the manufacturers to sell throughout the colony.

1. *The Chairman.*] You mean that, in addition to selling the imported leather, the merchants also sell the manufactured article?—I mean that the manufacturers are financially at the mercy of the importers—that is, they take boots back and sell them for the manufacturers. Stagnation in trade is not due to want of material. Imported East India kip is sold at 1s. 4d. and 1s. 10d. per lb. We are compelled to lower it down to 1s. 2d. and 1s. 8d. per lb. You might wish to know the reason why we have to reduce it to this price. On East India kip there is only 1d. per pound duty, while on kip there is 3d., that is, ordinary kip; so that you see how importers, in influencing the tariff arrangements of 1888, were very careful to keep the duty off East India kip, owing to their large trade in this line. All other classes are rated at 3d., and the East India, which is the best article, is admitted at 1d.; this is the article which crushes us. The amount of kip (including also cordovan, kangaroo, levant, cow- and horse-hide) imported during the years 1891 and 1892 was 23,600lb., upon which a duty of £295 was received, while sole leather and East India kip amounted to 323,760lb., and at the rate of 1d. per pound duty contributed £1,349; therefore ordinary kip contributed at 3d., £295. The employers are fully alive to a reform in this direction, and they intend to go in and manufacture East India if they can get a fair duty put on; they are unanimous from end to end of the two islands. I saw Mr. Bowron, a leading manufacturer of Woolston, in Canterbury, and he said, "Well, that will not pay at all until we can compete with the imported article." So that if a duty was put on, it would enable the manufacturer to import the article raw, manufacture, and sell it in the colony. Tweed is only buff kip, so that if the word "buff" was put into the tariff it would stop any fraud by importing under the term "buff kip." Enormous quantities of what is called tweed or buff kip is imported from America, and it cuts us out terribly, because it cuts off all our outlet from that class of goods, as it is sold at a very low figure, from 2s. to 2s. 4d. a pound. Tweed is very light, and the price of the article must be raised when it is made thin—that is, the price per pound. The sides, which are imported from America, are sold at from 13s. to 14s. per side; it costs 1s. more to manufacture the article locally and take the grain off, which leaves us no return. In America they have all the appliances to perform this work, whereas we are as children compared to them till we receive the necessary assistance. Here is a leather called "levant," it is used for the high tops of girls' and childrens' boots, but there is no wear in it; it is like brown paper. It is got up neatly with a nice outside finish, but the lining is often the strongest part. The importation of this leather, also tweed or buff, and split, into the colony is an imposition. It causes many a poor man to wonder why he has pains in his legs; it is not genuine, and no better than a piece of brown paper. You will see boots made from this material sold at 4s. 11d., 5s., and 6s. per pair, a price which would not pay for manufacturing decent material. It is upon those articles that I should like to see an increased tariff placed. The Americans are people that have no sympathy with us, and we should have none for them. This leather is mostly brought by the Frisco mail steamers, and landed at Auckland. I have seen some of it sold as low as 7d. per pound. It costs more to produce leather in the rough. This leather is only sent to the colonies because there is no use or sale for it in America.

2. Is there any machinery in the colony for splitting hides to obtain this leather?—Yes, there are two.

3. So that this work, which you really condemn, is practised in the colony?—No, not yet; we cannot compete with the imported article. They use the machines for splitting simply.

4. It appears to me from what you have said that the article which is imported from America is an imposition, yet there are people in this colony who have imported machines to manufacture what is really injurious in America?—Most of the American leather imported into this country is