

Commissioners are of opinion that the increase accruing from this direction may be beneficially applied in effecting decreases in other directions, to the benefit of the population of the colony.

Fruit.

23. The question of the fruit industry has given your Commissioners cause for much anxious consideration. They have been asked by fruit-growers in every part of the colony, from Invercargill to Auckland, to increase the rate of duty on imported fruit. On the other hand, a number of witnesses have urged the opposite view, asserting that a sufficient supply of New Zealand fruit is not forthcoming to meet requirements, and that an increase of duty is therefore inexpedient. Several deputations on the subject of this industry included in their requests for a duty, or an increased duty, not only the fruits that can be grown in the colony, but also the fruits imported from the South Sea Islands. Your Commissioners are of opinion that it would be impolitic, from a national point of view, to do anything that would imperil the extension of the growing trade between New Zealand and the islands of the Pacific, and they have therefore unanimously refused to recommend the imposition of any duty upon the fruits imported from the islands—that is to say, upon sub-tropical fruits. On the other hand, by a majority, they have agreed to recommend that the duty on fruit at present classed as dutiable should be increased from one halfpenny to one penny per pound; and that there should be included in the dutiable list with the fruits previously enumerated as dutiable the following, viz.: medlars, currants, raspberries, gooseberries, strawberries, and blackberries; it having been shown that these are among the fruits which are imported.

Machinery.

24. One of the most difficult questions—indeed, the most difficult which your Commissioners have had to approach—has been that of the duties upon machinery. The engineers' societies have represented to the Commission that a large number of men in this industry are out of employment, or are only working short time; but the remedy the societies have proposed—viz., large increases of duty—is so drastic that the Commission has been unable to recommend compliance with their requests—especially in view of the fact that all other industries, almost without exception, have urged that their machinery should be admitted duty-free, and also of the further fact that the low prices of farm produce which have recently obtained would render any proposal for an increase of duties upon agricultural machinery utterly impossible of acceptance. Your Commissioners, however, have endeavoured not to intensify the difficulties under which the machinery-manufacturing industry labours, and in only two or three instances have they added to the list of exemptions as regards machinery. The instances referred to are wood-working machinery, machinery for twine-making, and machinery for paper- and woollen-mills. With these exceptions they have left the duties on machinery *in statu quo*.

Boots, shoes,  
and leather.

25. There are two other large industries which, like the machine manufacturing and producing interests, are, to some extent, interdependent, and, to some extent, mutually antagonistic. These are the bootmaking and the leather-making industries. The bootmakers naturally desire free leather, while the leather-makers, in common with other industries, as naturally desire a fair share of protection. The Commission has endeavoured to balance these claims, and ventures to think that it has succeeded in arriving at a fair solution of the difficulty, by increasing the rate for boots to 25 per cent., and by giving some further protection to the leather industry. It may be added here that the bootmakers in some parts of the colony have urged the adoption of a specific duty at per pair in addition to an *ad valorem* duty, but your Commissioners are of opinion that it is very undesirable to have a compound system of duties, and on that ground alone they would have rejected the proposal. But independently of this, and even if the compound system had been considered feasible, it appears to your Commissioners that the scale proposed would have pressed unduly heavily upon the lower classes of goods and fallen too lightly upon the more expensive.

Soft goods,  
flannelettes, &c.

26. In soft goods, the Commissioners have placed silks, satins, velvets, millinery, trimmings, and laces under the highest rate of duty, as being articles of non-necessity, and they recommend what they think will be a great advantage