

HEMP.

Unlike preceding years, the market for New Zealand hemp has been unsatisfactory. Compared with twelve months ago, when the price of "good fair" on spot was £35, at the close of this official year the quotation must be regarded as disappointing, being only £24 10s. per ton. The fall has been steady for weeks. Since September prices have been receding. The decline first became apparent in Manila hemp, the quotation for which was reduced so rapidly that the value of "fair current" grade, both on spot and to arrive, was the same as for New Zealand "good fair." Naturally buyers declined to purchase New Zealand hemp at the same price as Manila, and accordingly values had to be adjusted. For some time there had been a feeling that the price had been rather high. Naturally, anything that could be seized upon to reduce values was welcomed by buyers. Consequently, when reports began to be circulated that shipments of hemp from Manila were likely to show considerable increase and to be heavy, purchasers used the information to "bear" the market. The hemp-market is, of course, one usually more or less speculative, and is therefore susceptible to manipulation by dealers. Under ordinary conditions, however, the market might not have been seriously influenced by these reports, but unfortunately at the same time the financial troubles in America occurred. The large trade done between Manila and America was to a considerable extent disturbed, and this was reflected here. It was felt that direct business with America might be curtailed, and that shipments from Manila even larger than anticipated might be directed to this country. All these influences had their effect, and, I consider, afford sufficient reason for the fall that took place in the price of hemp. At present I am glad to note a better tone in the market, and I am inclined to believe that prices will improve. Trade has been good, and supplies of hemp are not excessive.

During the year a visit was paid to this country by Mr. Fulton, Chief Fibre Expert. Along with him I visited many of the leading ropemakers, spinners, and others handling New Zealand fibre in this country. A great deal of valuable information was obtained which has been carefully noted by Mr. Fulton, whose intention it is, I understand, to make a full report on the hemp industry in this country and on the Continent, on his return to New Zealand.

In accordance with instructions a collection of small average samples of all the grades of fibre competing on the London market with New Zealand hemp was got together and shipped to Wellington.

DIRECT WEST-OF-ENGLAND STEAM SERVICE.

A good deal of attention has been given to the direct steam service between New Zealand and west-of-England ports. From close inquiry amongst merchants handling New Zealand produce in the centres served by this line it would appear that the service is not proving so satisfactory and advantageous as had been anticipated. The chief reason for this is irregularity of arrivals. Complaints have been made that dependance cannot be placed on the dates of arrival of the steamers, and that therefore it is impossible to enter into any defined contracts for the supply of produce shipped by the line. Several of the merchants handling dairy-produce informed Mr. Cuddie and myself that they have been making arrangements for delivery by London instead of by west coast, much though they regretted doing so, as after giving the service a fair trial they found things in regard to it were not showing that improvement they desired. Regularity of arrival of the boats is one of the principal things that must be aimed at if the service is to be made successful. Reductions in freight are acceptable and are worth striving for, but I consider it is of far more importance that some arrangement should be entered into by shippers with the shipping company whereby regularity of arrival of shipments may be assured. Any effort to improve this would be appreciated, I am certain, by the merchants interested in the west-coast trade.

SHIPMENT OF APPLES.

Last summer a consignment of apples was sent to London from New Zealand. The parcel comprised 396 crates. Unfortunately the apples had been shipped at Wellington as ordinary cargo. No special chamber had been prepared for them, nor had any means been taken to maintain an even and cool temperature in the hold where they were stored, as is essential for the conveyance of apples through the tropics. The result was that on arrival here the apples were spoiled. On examining the cases fully 50 per cent. of the contents were found to be bad. The only thing that could be done with the shipment was to sell it as quickly as possible with all faults, for it was feared that if the sanitary authorities at the port noticed its condition they would condemn the lot. Consequently the parcel was sold at 2s. 6d. per case. The result was most disappointing. It is difficult to comprehend how the apples came to be shipped as ordinary cargo. If shipped under proper conditions there is little risk in sending apples to the London market from New Zealand, and prices that would prove remunerative to growers in the Dominion can be assured.

POULTRY CONFERENCE.

For the Second National Poultry Conference held at Reading in July I had the honour of being asked to prepare a paper on "Cold-storage of Poultry," which was read at one of the meetings of the Conference.

"NEW ZEALAND FARMER" AND "DAIRYMAN" FOR DISTRIBUTION.

In accordance with the wishes of the Government I ascertained that issues of the *New Zealand Farmer* and the *New Zealand Dairyman* would be of great interest in various reading-rooms and libraries, and to grocers' associations, &c., throughout the country. A supply of these papers has been received regularly from the Dominion, and the publications have been at once distributed to those centres where they are desired. From letters received it is evident that the papers are doing good service in bringing New Zealand affairs before the notice of the readers, and that they are highly appreciated.