

assessing damage and quality claims. British trade having greatly revived, the latest figures available showing considerable increase in both exports and imports for the past year, it follows that fresh avenues of employment will be open to the people of Great Britain, and consequent thereon a hardening of prices for both mutton and lamb should follow. There is fairly reliable evidence that the American meat trusts are operating largely in Argentine meat, and the actions of the trusts may have some influence on the present slump; but there is no conclusive evidence that this is the case.

The butter and cheese markets throughout the year have been eminently satisfactory. The average prices realised have been greater than for any previous year, and at the same time the volume of exports has been greater. I regret to note that there is this year a greater margin between the prices obtained for Danish butter and New Zealand butter than has been the case for the past two years. This in part is attributed to the fact that New Zealand butter during the present year has carried a greater content of moisture than in previous years. It would appear that other causes were operating, as the margin of difference has since greatly lessened.

Exports of kauri-gum have fallen away during the year as compared with the previous year to the extent of 580 tons, valued at £66,664. A good deal of dissatisfaction has been expressed by gum-diggers with the prices obtained on the fields and in Auckland, and in consequence the Trade Representative was sent to the gum districts to inquire into and report on the matter. A *précis* of his report will be found in the appendices to this report. In order that the Government may be in a position to determine whether it is possible to put the marketing of gum on a better footing, the High Commissioner in London has been instructed to make exhaustive inquiries and to report fully on the conditions of marketing existing in Great Britain and America.

There appear to be reasonably good prospects of cheese maintaining values on the London market for some time to come.

There has been no improvement in the hemp-market throughout the year, but rather a weakening in the prices of 1908, and total exports have decreased in value. The very heavy output of manila hemp continues, but from difficulties arising in connection with labour in the Philippines it is not improbable that an improvement in our prices may result in consequence. Large quantities of New Zealand fibre are, however, well sought after on account of its special value for the manufacture of binder-twines. There are also improved methods of dealing with hemp shortly to be brought into operation here which, it is claimed, will improve the quality and insure better prices being obtained.

The export trade with the western ports of England during the year has been unsatisfactory, and shows a considerable shrinkage. The position is due to some extent, no doubt, to the trade depression, but there are other influences more particularly bearing on the point. The irregular running of the steam service, with indefinite dates of arrival, has been a serious factor in bringing about the present position of trade; coupled with this special terms are being offered by London merchants to buyers in the western districts, which have gone far to cover the cost of railage from London. This, added to the facilities for obtaining regular supplies, has diverted a good deal of the trade *via* London which previously went direct to western ports.

The steam service between Vancouver and New Zealand ports which was subsidised by the Government has been running throughout the year. As, however, the steamers are not fitted with refrigerated chambers, their value has been restricted, and, as the volume of trade being done was small, it was decided not to continue the arrangement with the Alley line on the expiring of the contract in June, 1909.

The rise of Japan as a wool-consuming country, and the enormous increase of her imports from Australia, seems to me to warrant a further inquiry as to whether New Zealand cannot obtain a share, of the great markets now being so successfully exploited in the East by our neighbouring States of Australia.

In order to advertise our main lines of produce, comprehensive displays have been made at several exhibitions. At the Franco-British Exhibition a splendid show was made of all typical New Zealand products, and also at the Imperial International Exhibition which is now open. Other shows at which New Zealand was well represented were the Darlington Grain Show, Yorkshire, and the Colonial Fruit Show of the Royal Horticultural Society, London, in June, 1908, and the Show for Home and Colonial Fruits held in November under the auspices of the same society.

At the Imperial Conference held in London in 1906, strong representations were made by the Right Hon. the Premier as to the necessity for making some provision to keep British exporters posted regarding the trade requirements of the outlying portions of the Empire. He drew attention to the foreign consuls, who are stationed all over the British Empire, to report on trade prospects, while the British exporters had really nobody to apply to for such information regarding the state of commerce in Canada and other British countries. The outcome of this representation was the appointment of Commissioners by the Board of Trade to look after the interest of the Home manufacturers in oversea States of the Empire.

Mr. G. H. F. Rolleston was appointed during the year by the Board of Trade to the position of British Trade Commissioner for New Zealand. His headquarters are fixed in Wellington, and he has visited the main centres of this Dominion in order to meet merchants and business men.

#### CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE CONGRESS.

The London Chamber of Commerce confirmed the decision to hold the 1909 Congress of Chambers of Commerce in Australasian cities, and it will commence in Sydney on or about the 14th September. To this gathering will come probably three hundred delegates from the chief cities of the United Kingdom and all the British dominions beyond the seas. The Congress will sit for a week or more in Sydney, and afterwards its members will visit the various States of the Commonwealth, and a number are expected