

Early in 1912 details came to hand regarding the Mexican Government's agreement with the sisal-growers, generally referred to as a "valorization" scheme. This was instituted with the view to protecting growers in Mexico from the "bear" efforts of large buyers in New York, &c., prices having been depressed to a practically unpayable limit. Full particulars were duly advised the Department. The immediate effect of the inauguration of the arrangement was to raise prices all round, and from our point of view it is to be hoped that the scheme will meet with the success which planters and others look for.

I am pleased to be able to state that during the twelvemonth complaints in regard to the grading of our hemp and tow have been less frequent than usual. As regards tow, it was noted that shipments from the Dominion showed a marked decrease, and several inquiries were received as to the reason. As no particulars were available, the inquiry was referred to Wellington. I trust that the suggestion I then made for a larger space to be given to the remarks concerning tow in the *Journal of the Department of Agriculture* will meet with approval, as these notes are of the greatest use and interest in connection with the work at this end.

DAIRY-PRODUCE.

Butter.

The twelvemonth has been remarkable for the high prices ruling in the butter-market, and factories in the Dominion are to be congratulated on having had one of the best years ever experienced. As a matter of fact, not since the 1907-8 butter crisis have prices ruled so high, as will have been seen from the weekly cables. The average quotation for the twelvemonth works out at 120s. per hundredweight for finest New Zealand butter, which compares well with last year's figure of 109s. 9d. On the same basis, the average Danish quotation has been 128s. 6d. per hundredweight—a difference of 8s. 9d., as against 6s. 9d. last year. This figure, however, does not show the true difference, and can, I think, be accounted for by the following facts. For a much longer period than usual New Zealand butter was off the markets in this country—in fact, while there were only eight weeks in 1910-11 in which quotations were not included in the weekly cables, for fifteen weeks in succession during 1911-12 no prices could be given. This was from the end of July onwards, when the weather was exceptionally hot, and supplies of Home and Continental butter were short. During that time Danish quotations were very high, starting at 122s. at the end of July, quickly going to 126s., and from this time up to the beginning of November various figures up to 148s. per hundredweight were quoted. Thus, fourteen exceptionally high quotations are included in the figures from which the year's average was obtained, so that if these weeks are excluded and averages taken accordingly, it will be noted with satisfaction that the margin has been narrowed to about 5s. 9d. per hundredweight.

Coming to the matter of imports, on looking through the Board of Trade returns several features of interest will be noted. With the exception of the first quarter of 1911, imports of butter from all sources showed big decreases for each three-monthly period, and, although greater than the 1909 figures by some 240,000 cwt., the total imports for 1911 fell short of those of 1910 by 23,000 cwt. I give below statistics of the total imports into the United Kingdom for the last three years, taking each quarterly period up to the close of the official year:—

Quarter ending—	1909. Cwt.	1910. Cwt.	1911. Cwt.
31st March	1,133,638	1,090,744	1,261,495
30th June	976,813	1,176,158	1,135,668
30th September ..	1,048,231	1,023,951	980,839
31st December ..	904,130	1,034,686	924,954
	<hr/> 4,062,812	<hr/> 4,325,539	<hr/> 4,302,956
Quarter ending—	1910. Cwt.	1911. Cwt.	1912. Cwt.
31st March	1,090,744	1,261,495	1,147,674

From this it will be seen that the excess of importations for the March quarter of 1911, as compared with the same period of 1910, of 170,000 cwt. was more than counterbalanced by regular decreases for the remainder of the year, and, as a matter of fact, for the last nine months of 1911 imports were considerably over 193,000 cwt. less than for those of the corresponding period of 1910.

As regards the countries whence these imports are derived, Denmark sent 19,000 cwt. less than in 1910, and 57,000 cwt. less than in 1909. There was a large increase in the imports for the March quarter of 1911 as against those for 1910, while the remaining quarters all show decreases. Imports from France did not reach half the 1910 figures, and those from the Netherlands showed a decline of over 30 per cent. Argentine, too, sent little more than a third of the 1910 totals. Russia (Siberia) and Sweden marked increases for the year.

It will be of interest to note that in 1911 23,316 cwt. of butter was received from the United States of America, from where only 756 cwt. in 1910 and 693 cwt. in 1909 came to hand. Of course, the greater part of this product is the so-called "renovated" butter. Canadian imports have also increased enormously, the totals for the past three years being 61,936 cwt. for 1911, 16,805 cwt. for 1910, and 22,522 cwt. for 1909. As regards Australia, imports from all States show a large increase on the 1910 figures, amounting in total to over 35 per cent.; and it must be remembered that there was an increase in 1910 of 65 per cent. over the 1909 imports, so that the extent of the development in the Commonwealth is easily seen. From the statistics it is apparent that in New South Wales and Queensland the new season has opened much later than usual.