

Other Rough Sawn Timbers—

Australia.			per 100
S. ft.	£	s.	d.
10,036,678	199,376	39	9.00
Canada.			per 100
S. ft.	£	s.	d.
219,216	3,036	27	8.5
Japan.			per 100
S. ft.	£	s.	d.
423,554	19,485	92	0.5
U.S.A.			per 100
S. ft.	£	s.	d.
827,128	15,849	38	4.00

A study of the foregoing figures is both interesting and instructive, and it will be noticed that the peak of imports as to quantity was reached in the year 1908, when the average value was at its lowest. It is also significant that the year in question and the following year were the period of probably the greatest "slump" in New Zealand sawmilling that the industry has ever suffered under, and it was the excessive imports and consequent stagnation in the industry which led to the setting up of the 1909 Timber Commission which recommended a 50 per cent. increase in duty on imported timbers when their average value was less than a third of what it was last year.

In face of these figures therefore and the incontrovertible case which the Sawmillers' Federation put before the Tariff Commission and the Government for an increase in the timber schedules of the tariff, it is indeed difficult to understand why the largest industry in this Dominion should be singled out for less protection than it had (comparative as to value) fifty years ago, and less than even any "one-man" industry in the country.

To those who have the welfare of the industry at heart, however, there is some consolation in the knowledge that a substantial increase in the duty on timber was amply justified and warranted on the merits of the case put forward as well as from a national point of view, and in the knowledge that there is more than the probability that such increase was recommended to Cabinet by the Tariff Commission. Our present Government, however, "would not hear of it for a moment" owing to the fear that they might be held responsible by the people for raising the price of timber and thus lose votes. This notwithstanding the fact that it was amply proved to the Tariff Commission and to the leaders of the Government (if they had taken sufficient trouble or interest in a matter of such national importance to thoroughly consider the evidence put before them) that unchecked imports of low grade foreign timbers will displace our own low grades, which will go up in smoke

instead of being utilised, and will inevitably lead to higher costs and prices in the future.

To produce cheaper timber 100 per cent. utilisation of our forests is essential, but with our low grades forced off the market by importations this will be impossible. Thus did political considerations lead our Reform Government to do an injustice to the sawmilling industry, and, we consider, a lasting and grievous harm to the cause of forestry and the ultimate well-being of the Dominion.

To return, however, to a consideration of the figures regarding imports of timber given above, it will be remembered that in regard to the "slump" of 1908-9 there had just previously been a building boom and New Zealand had an over supply of dwellings, and empty houses were very numerous in all towns. In fact, to compare that period of depression with the present, it was recently expressed: "There was then an empty house in about every five along the street, whereas now about every fifth house contains five families owing to the shortage of dwellings." To this extent therefore the figures display a "message of hope" to the sawmiller, who is at present suffering a shortage of orders.

It must also be remembered that the present "slump" in building is due entirely to the financial depression, and is not the result of over speculation in "suburban lots" and building, as was the last.

Though the import figures for the nine months of 1921 are leading in the direction of those for 1907-8, it is satisfactory to know that whereas quotations for oregon reached as low as from 15s. to 17s. 6d. a few months ago, the most recent one under our notice has risen to 21s. This may be but a temporary inflation, but the indications are that the lowest likely level was touched at 15s. and that the "bottom" had then been reached.

Consideration of the 2s. per 100 super feet duty levied on the rough sawn imports given for the ten months, 1921, from an *ad valorem* standpoint is also interesting.

It will be seen that the duty on the oregon from both Canada and U.S.A. represents roughly 10 per cent. *ad valorem*; on the hardwoods from Australia roughly 5 per cent. *ad valorem*; on "other timbers" (oak, etc.), from Canada roughly 7 per cent., from U.S.A. just over 5 per cent., and from Japan (the timber the import of which should be most discouraged by a high duty) only 2 per cent. *ad valorem*.

Mr. W. T. Irvine is still in Sydney, and the most recent news is that his health is very much improved. He has been taking a keen interest in the timber trade and the Commonwealth tariff while there, and has kept us supplied with much useful information concerning both matters.

Mr. Joseph Butler, of the Kauri Timber Co., is now in America on his way back to New Zealand, and is expected to arrive some time in January.