

No. 12.

SIR,—

Auckland, 12th August, 1870.

In reply to your letter requesting information with reference to the branch of industry with which I am connected, I beg to lay before your Committee the following remarks :—

I have been upwards of thirty years in this Colony, and have been carrying on business as a tanner, currier, and wool-scourer for the past six years, and have had a steady and increasing demand, year after year, for the goods which I manufacture. I have experienced many obstacles to the progress of my trade—some incidental to a young Colony, and which time will remove; others of a more serious nature, which I will now proceed to specify.

Bark suitable for tanning purposes has to be imported from the neighbouring colonies of Australia and Tasmania, New Zealand bark (as I shall presently show) not possessing enough of the tanning principle. The expense of importing such a bulky article is a serious drawback to my trade, as I have to compete with leather manufacturers in Australia and elsewhere, who, in addition to having this important ingredient on the spot, have the advantage of a more plentiful and cheaper supply of labour.

A moderately increased duty on boots, shoes, and leather, would, in my humble judgment, tend to foster the trade until the natural growth of the Colony and the enterprise of our agriculturists have provided those materials for carrying on the manufacture of leather of which we are now deficient.

The following I would respectfully suggest as the rate of duties necessary to encourage the manufacture of leather in this Colony :—Sole and harness leather, 2d. per lb.; all other kinds, 3d. per lb.; water-tight and Napoleon boots, 5s. per cubic foot; boots and shoes of all other kinds, 7s. 6d. per cubic foot.

Great quantities of boots, shoes, and leather are now imported from Australia, owing to the causes I have named, and which I think the imposition of an increased duty would tend to counteract.

The bad state of the roads, too, is an impediment to the profitable extension of my business.

At the present time I am in a position to tan from 350 to 400 hides, and 1,200 sheep-skins, per month; these are manufactured into sole, kip, harness, bag, rein, and grain leathers, and black and brown basils; and in the wool-scouring department I am capable of stripping, sorting, scouring, and washing 3,000 sheep-skins per month, having thirty-seven pits and limes, with extensive buildings and plant, for preparing leather in all stages of its manufacture, as well as for washing and drying wool. I employ about thirty hands.

The industry in which I am engaged is suitable to the circumstances of the Colony, from the fact that, as the rearing of cattle and sheep forms the principal occupation of a large number of the colonists, the raw material is produced in large quantities. I do not consider it capable of much extension so far as the exportation of leather from New Zealand is concerned; but its extension as a branch of local industry is only limited by the growth and prosperity of the Colony at large.

Hides and skins are the chief items of raw material employed in my business, and are procured principally from this Province (Auckland), and, as I have already intimated, are to be obtained here in quantities nearly, if not quite, sufficient for the supply of the manufacturers.

I can procure abundance of skilled labour, but at rates generally higher than are paid in the neighbouring Colonies.

Again, referring to one very important article used in my business, namely, bark, I may remark that the greater portion used by me has been the mimosa or black wattle, so called, both in Australia and Tasmania, to distinguish it from a much inferior kind named the silver wattle. This bark (the black wattle) is much used in England, where it realizes from £8 to £9 per ton. I have occasionally used a little New Zealand towai and rimu bark, but prefer the wattle. The barks in this country, with which I am practically acquainted, are inferior in quality, and, on account of their weakness, unprofitable in their operation.

When residing on the Hokianga River, in the year 1841-42, I tested the various qualities of the towai, rimu, tanekaha, and hinau barks, and although the results showed that they all contained a portion of astringent qualities, yet by no means sufficient to guarantee a profitable return for the outlay of capital. The towai is deficient in the gummy, resinous properties for which the English oak is so celebrated; the rimu possesses too much gum of a dark blood colour, and too little of the tanning principle; the tanekaha has a superabundance of dye, with a moderate amount of tanning principle, which latter is counteracted by the presence of a large quantity of turpentine; and the hinau contains too much black dye, which must be very objectionable in the appearance of leather.

I am impressed with the importance of introducing into this Colony, as speedily as possible, some substitute for barks which are almost valueless. I would, with due deference to your Committee, suggest that the cultivation of the black wattle ought to be at once encouraged, and also that of a plant known in India as "divi divi," and used by some tanners in England. About two years ago I imported five tons of divi divi pods, which, for strength in tanning, I consider unequalled. Each pod contained one seed, but nearly seven-eighths of these seeds had been perforated by some insect. Selecting some of the sound ones, I planted them, but without success. I then gave a few to a gentleman of my acquaintance, who kindly planted them in his hothouse, when he too was unsuccessful, so I concluded that we had each of us planted at the wrong season, or else the climate was unsuited to the growth of the plant. Finding these pods expensive (£16 per ton), I discontinued importing, feeling satisfied that the seeds would not germinate; but to my very agreeable surprise, on removing a heap of spent tan and pods which had been thrown out of a pit and laid in a heap for three months, I found about a dozen, at a depth of three feet, which had grown about one inch and a half high, with three small circular-shaped leaves at the top of the stem. Carefully packing them up I returned home; but the sudden transition from their hotbed to a colder atmosphere had destroyed their vitality. What the degree of heat in which they had germinated was, I had not the means, at the time, of ascertaining, but, feeling it very hot, I could only conclude that the climate in which the plant luxuriated so quickly must be much