

Evidence of Mr. C. S. REEVES, Proprietor of the Milton Pottery Works, taken before the Commission on Local Industries, Dunedin, 18th May, 1880.

I HAVE not very much to say on this question. I have taken up an industry that was established some years back; but up to the present it has failed. I am, however, determined, if I possibly can, to make it successful. The duty was altered last session from 10 to 15 per cent. That is, of course, a very considerable item in itself, and no doubt it will give some assistance. Not having my premises in full working order, I am not yet able to say whether or not I shall be successful with my manufactures. If I am able to overcome the prejudice which Mr. McLeod says exists, and which I know does exist, against colonial manufactures, I think I shall be able to make the pottery business a success in this colony. We have good raw material at hand—the clay is here to be dug out—the only thing required is its manipulation. There are a few articles imported by those in the business that might with advantage be produced here. For instance, demijohns are admitted at 10 per cent. duty. In Victoria the protection being large has induced the manufacture of demijohns on a very extensive scale. There is, indeed, no such thing as an imported demijohn in that colony. The chemists, &c., require such large quantities of this article that the manufacturers there are able to turn out large quantities of them, and are able to sell them down here at an exceedingly low price. These articles are now subject to a duty of 10 per cent. It might be raised to 15 per cent., the same as earthenware. Filters are admitted free, and it is only a question of time when we shall be able to make them here, and to compete successfully with the Home manufacturer. Firebricks and tiles are also admitted free at present. I am now making firebricks at Milton that compare favourably with any British-made firebricks. There is another article I am making, as are several others—I mean drain-pipes. Mr. White, at Kensington, also makes a large number of them. Drain-pipes are admitted free into the colony. I may point out, for instance, what happened the other day at Christchurch. The Drainage Board there accepted a tender for the supply of eight thousand pounds' worth of imported drain-pipes. The importer's tender was some six or seven hundred pounds under the tender of the local manufacturer. Had the tender been given to the local manufacturer it would have been the means of giving employment to some fifty or sixty hands for about eight months, and instead of money being sent out of the colony it would have been retained in it. Had there been a duty of 10 per cent. on drain-pipes the work would have gone to the local manufacturer. This is a very glaring instance; and the question crops up, how far the tariff should go on the side of protection. There is nothing further that I know or think of just now. I am perfectly satisfied with the 15 per cent. duty. With that duty I think that if the manufacture here of earthenware does not succeed, the time has not arrived when it should be established. This duty on the common class of goods will give a very great advantage to the colonially-manufactured article. It will allow the colonial manufacturer to get a greater outlet. It is my opinion, based on the output, that no manufacturer will produce goods at a price at which they cannot be disposed of. If I am able to send out a thousand pounds' worth of goods a month, I calculate on a certain profit; if I am able to double that, then I am able to sell at a less price, and less than what it can be imported for. The importers of earthenware here, as soon as they see I am able to supply the market, will write Home to their friends to that effect, and there can be no question but that rather than lose the trade they will make considerable reduction in their business. Thus it is that the Staffordshire people have been completely cut out of the American trade, with the result that potteries have been established in various parts of America. The same result will be observable here in the course of time. I believe that we shall see two or three potteries in the colony with every chance of success. The great difficulty staring us in the face is the labour question. In the course of a little time I shall require more hands, and I shall have to import them from Home. If free and assisted immigration is stopped I shall have to ask the Government to assist me in importing the labour I require. My pottery, in full work, is capable of employing seventy hands; I now employ thirty. I do not know that I can give the Commission any further information; but, if they can spare the time, I should wish to show them some of my manufactures.

110. *Mr. Bain.*] Do you think it is necessary to import labour? Have you tried to procure the labour in the colony?—I have advertised for it. You see that the potter's is a peculiar kind of labour. I could put on at once double the number of hands I have if I could get them.

111. I think that if you advertised, considerable numbers might turn up. I know in my experience that men have turned up in most unexpected quarters who have had special training in connection with industries—in fact, in places where you would never have expected to find them. I think if you advertised in the colony you would perhaps find as many men as you require?—I will think over your suggestion. I dare say it is worth acting on. I will make up my mind to do so presently—as soon as I get my premises finished. When I get them finished and in good working order I shall have room for fifty hands if I could get them.

112. You have referred to the Christchurch Drainage Board importing pipes from Home. I can recollect the Town Council of Dunedin importing a hundred or more street-lamps, and, if I mistake not, you were either Mayor or a member of the Council at the time. Did you give an opportunity at that time to the local foundries to make those lamps?—It was not considered that they could possibly sell them at a price for which they could be imported. I understand that afterwards some of the local manufacturers expressed their desire to tender for these lamps, and I believe that tenders were sent in, although the order for their purchase had been sent Home.

113. You confess to having had then a little of that prejudice which you now condemn?—I confess that I had not the same views then as I have now. Every day confirms me in the position I have taken up now with regard to the manufacturing industries of this country—namely, that they must be supported in every shape and form. We must have manufactures in this country.

114. What imported articles do you use in connection with your pottery works?—The only things I expect to import from Home are printing-paper, paints, and plaster of Paris; everything else I hope to be able to obtain here.

115. Have you got kaolin?—The clay we are using now is a very peculiar one. I could not use the same mixtures as they use at Home.