

gradually falling off. I was sent by the trade in 1892 all over the colony to inquire into the state of trade, and find out the cause of so much slackness and broken time in the shoe-leather department of our trade. I carried with me a petition that we had started in Wellington to petition the House of Representatives for redress on that part of the trade that was affected by imported leather. Everywhere I went I was received with open hands. I was told it was impossible for them to work full time in the yards and sell at a profit, which simply means that when the yards are not fully going the hands are not fully employed; and, in order to compete with the imported leather, it would be necessary to have a little extra protection from outside the colony, especially America. About three months ago the curriers in Wellington had their wages reduced from 10s. to £1 2s. per week. It is almost incredible that in some instances it is less than other parts of the colony. Now, since the tariff of 6d. was put on harness-leather, that branch of the trade has shown a considerable increase. In most shops the output is double. In Messrs. Hirst and Co.'s the increase is treble on harness-leather; while the shoe-leather is merely dressed to work away a class of hides that is not fit for profitable purposes. Kip is sold at 1s. 2d. to 1s. 6d., while you can buy East India kip from 1s. 4d. upwards, and it is more profitable to the bootmaker than our kip, for it has the offal cut off. The importers in 1888 were very careful to keep the duty off that class of goods. I may tell you there is only 1d. on East India kip, and 3d. on kip. East India kips are produced in large factories at Home, and the work is nearly all done by machinery. Our employers say that if a fair tariff was put on them it would give them a chance of importing them in the raw and tanning them in the colony. But it is impossible under present circumstances, as they have tried it. The quantity of East India kip imported is about ten times all the other curried leathers put together that are imported from England. There are two classes of goods that are imported from America that are ruinous to our trade and to the bootmakers also—buff and splits. These two classes of goods are shipped here in great quantities, and completely glut our markets. Splits are simply slices taken off the hide and dried. This is the class of leather that produces those cheap bluchers you see at boot-shop doors ticketed from 4s. 11d. per pair. To produce this class of goods and compete with the imported the employers have to sack men, and boy-labour is ruining our trade. Buff is simply the grain scraped off the hide and sold as kid to those who do not know better. American splits are sold from 8d. per pound; colonial, 10d. to 1s. 2d. American buff, from 13s. to 14s. per side; colonial, from 15s. to 17s. American buff tears like brown paper. It costs 1s. more to dress this class of goods than kip, and it has always very large sides. It is through this American buff that our employers have to ship away from the colony so many light hides that ought to be dressed here. One reason that so much imported leather is made up in the colony is that a good many of the bootmakers are compelled to work up the imported leather or the importer would not take back the boot, and sell them through the country. Year after year, as our apprentices come out of their time, some of them have to leave the trade, and try something else. Another drawback to tanning in New Zealand is that all barks have to be imported. I would propose 3d. be put on to East India kips, and buff and splits 4d.

215. You say the duty on harness-leather, 6d. a pound, has increased the trade?—Yes, by double and treble, and there has never been any grumbling from any sellers.

216. When was that imposed?—1888.

217. Then you say the duty on East India kip is only 1d.?—Yes; and the East India kip is more economical for the importer, because the offal is cut off it.

218. Do you know why East India kip is allowed in at 1d.?—The reason was the importer's had such a strong power when the tariff was put on that they kept it down.

219. Does East India kip come from England?—It goes to England, is manufactured, and then comes out here.

220. You have stated very clearly your grievance. How would you have this remedied?—We propose the tariff should be raised on these articles. On East India kip to 4d. per pound, on American buffs and splits to 6d.—that is, 4d. additional. The word "buff" means several different articles; everything that has the grain off comes under the term in the tariff.

221. *Mr. Hutchison.*] Do basils come under buff?—No; only what has the grain off.

222. Have you anything to say about harness?—No; there is 6d. on that, and we are quite satisfied with it.

223. *The Chairman.*] Do you know how many persons there are employed in the trade in the colony?—Seventy-two in Wellington; seventy-one in Christchurch; in Dunedin ten years ago there were eighty, but it has fallen now to forty-seven, including Sawyer's Bay (I was there a few weeks ago); eighty-two in Auckland; and five in New Plymouth.

224. In the smaller places?—There are none in Wanganui. There was a man in Napier, but I think he has given it up.

225. What about the South Island, Timaru and Oamaru?—There was one in Timaru, but he gave it up. There is one man employed in Invercargill. Roughly, the number amounts to 277.

226. Supposing the recommendations were carried out, and the extra duties put on, what would be the effect, do you think, on the volume of trade and number of employes?—Instead of the men in Wellington being employed only nine months in the year they would be employed fully. In Christchurch it is worse. The men are employed now not more than seven months in the year, and if the tariff were raised I believe they would have ample employment all the year round.

227. Could the present number of men overtake the increased amount of work?—It would give increased employment to the boys, who, after serving their time, leave the trade.

228. Can you say what the proportion of the duty is to the value of the article. East India kip is taxed 1d. per pound. What is a fair average price for kip?—Two shillings a pound.

229. Then, the present duty means about 4½ per cent.?—Yes. It is an article we would not like to keep out of the colony altogether, because it is a good article for a certain class of boot.

230. What is a fair average price for American buff?—About 14s. per side.