

which in wine-making countries is sold at 6d. or 1s. Even if sold at 1s. and 1s. 6d. there would be an immense trade for them as against other drinks.

312. What does the present duty of 5s. represent?—10d. a quart-bottle.

313. If there were no duty at all it would make a difference of 5d. a pint?—Yes. The trade is on a false basis, and the price per bottle ought never to have been 2s. 6d. or 3s. 6d. There has never been any retail Australian-wine trade here at all. The wines are imported largely in bulk, and bottled by dealers. They ought to be sold on the present prices even at a less price, but, owing to the fact that they are placed almost on a level with imported wines in the tariff, the same conditions attach to them. I have been in all the colonies, and in Victoria and New South Wales Australian wine can be obtained for 1s. a pint-bottle.

314. Presumably, the people who sell get a profit?—It takes two gallons to a case of wine, and the price per gallon of wine of a desirable class might be roughly stated at 4s. a gallon. I am speaking strictly on the wholesale basis. Then there is the cost of bottling, which I estimate at about 4s. 6d. per dozen quarts.

315. What do you mean by a quart-bottle?—Six to the gallon.

316. *Mr. Hutchison.*] Should not ordinary trade competition result if a man is making a large profit?—It is a question whether it is a large profit; but competition will regulate all that.

317. I understand this enhanced profit is made by the hotelkeeper, and not by the importer?—It goes right through the trade to the merchant and hotelkeeper, who sells a case of wine a month where he sells thirty cases of whiskey or beer.

318. *The Chairman.*] Do you know if the trade in Australian wine is increasing or not?—Between 1892 and 1893 there was, I think, rather a falling-off; but, speaking from memory, I do not think there has been a serious difference.

319. I think you will find there has been a considerable importation, and an increase in seven years of nearly 40 per cent., the figures in 1887 being 28,000 gallons, and in 1893 40,000 gallons?—Eight years ago all these wines were not fit for consumption. It is very easy to grow vines, but not to make wine, and the production of suitable Australian wine is only a matter of late years. It is quite lately that they have arrived by experience at anything like perfection in the manufacture of wine.

320. What reduction, in your opinion, should be made in the tariff?—A small reduction, I do not think, would make any difference at all. It would be very apt to get into the pockets of the trade.

321. *Mr. Hutchison.*] You want it off altogether?—Yes, with due regard to the revenue.

322. *The Chairman.*] Supposing there were no duty—on the assumption that something like one-fifth of the retail price of the wine is represented by duty—it would follow, apparently, that what was sold at 2s. 6d. would be sold at 2s.?—I do not think that would follow. Instead of being sold at 2s. or 2s. 6d., it would be sold at 1s. 6d. and 1s. 3d., because the trade is on a false basis. The consumption of wine is an absurdly small one in comparison with that of other drinks.

323. You assume the trade would be put on a fair basis by the mere fact of taking off the duty?—It would lead very much to a good trade in a good and wholesome wine, and competition would very soon bring it in at a price that would pay, whereas the hotels do a certain amount of trade in bottled, which is not, however, a big portion of it. The trade is really done over the bar at 6d. a glass, or by grocers' licenses, or wine-merchants doing family trade. Grocers sell a dozen of claret at a price that is far below any price I have given you. 2s. 6d. a pint represents what you would have to pay if you went into any decent hotel and ordered a pint; but if you went to a grocer and ordered a case you would get it at about one-half—about £1 10s. a dozen quarts.

324. *Mr. Stevens.*] If wine were admitted free, would that affect the production of New Zealand wines in any way?—That is a question I do not know that I am qualified to answer. The present production of New Zealand wines is extremely small, and in the hands of people who do not understand it.

325. If they can get competent people in Australia they could get them here, and I am assuming they are able to make it?—If they could turn out an article equal to South Australia, then the latter would be handicapped by the cost of bringing the wine here; but Australians say the New Zealand climate and temperature, except in the far north, is against the production, and there is very little to be done in wine-growing on a large scale.

326. *Mr. Mackenzie.*] Do not you think clarets ought to be produced here, although stronger wines might not?—I do not profess expert knowledge, but I have gathered that the soil is not suitable for the extensive growth of wine, except in the far north.

327. I always understood it was the sun rather than the soil. The sun is not strong enough to make a strong fortified wine?—That is probably why they mention the "far north"; but soil is a very material matter.

328. Your experience is the New Zealand wine has not been satisfactory?—Very far from it.

329. In your opinion, is Australian wine as wholesome as the continental wine?—I think, when matured, it is more wholesome than continental wine of a quality likely to come here and be sold at a price within the reach of all. In wines approximate in price the comparison would always be in favour of Australian.

330. Do you think the public can, as a rule, get a good glass of Australian wine in an ordinary publichouse?—No; I think the trade is on a very bad basis. Neither the hotels nor retail-dealers give the business the attention it warrants, the only reason I am able to assume being the high duty exacted, instead of its being classed amongst the articles of daily consumption.

331. When the duty was increased by 1s. a gallon in 1888, do you think that affected the quantity imported?—I do not think so.

332. In considering this question we have to keep an eye on the general revenue: do you think, if we took the duty nearly all off, and reduced it to 1s. a gallon, it would create a considerable