

736. *Mr. Hutchison.*] I gather generally that it is due to the apathy of the Auckland merchants, more than anything else, that the trade is likely to slip from us—by their quoting these high prices?—They are not apathetic, but they might be more pushing. I rather think the New Zealand people generally are apathetic in not pushing their potatoes and onions. Our onions maintain their quality and “hardness” after being in the islands for some time. None others will keep like them.

737. How can the farmers push trade more than they are doing?—The farmer does not get a show at all. For twenty years I have been trying to get the tariff lowered, or Parliament to assist the farmer, so that he can sell his onions; but Parliament does nothing but expend money upon public works, increase taxation, and raise the tariff, which means greater port- and city-storage charges, thereby increasing the cost of goods as against Sydney. We have a fortune in our outward tropical trade if we only follow it. But all Parliament has done for twenty-five years is to make a lot of costly railways which are before their time.

738. *Mr. Tanner.*] Would it not be better if the trade were done direct with Lyttelton, which is the centre around which the agricultural produce you refer to is mostly grown?—Yes.

739. *Mr. Hutchison.*] I suppose the island trade is done by two or three firms?—There are a number of German firms and Australian firms in it, and twenty or thirty different stores in Apia.

740. *Mr. Tanner.*] Samoa would have a bigger trade than any of them, and larger vessels engaged in it?—No; it would be larger than Tahiti or Barotonga, but France owns Tahiti, and Germany does a lot of business with Samoa. It is contemplated now to buy out the German interest there.

741. Who is going to do that?—Dalgettys are interested in the trade now, and Woods, Forsyth, and others, of Sydney.

742. *Mr. Hutchison.*] Would not a syndicate of that kind have a prejudicial effect on trade generally by preventing people going into it?—It would have a very beneficial effect. There was little or no trade with North Borneo until the Crown granted a charter to the North Borneo Trading Company in 1882. The pity is that Sir Julius Vogel interfered in 1874 with my obtaining a Pacific charter.

743. *The Chairman.*] I understand you to say that this company is not necessarily going to monopolize the trade, but that it is going to buy up the existing land-claims?—There is a certain German commercial interest in Samoa, and the suggestion is to buy out that interest. I think it a fair suggestion, and perhaps the best settlement of the present difficulty. The Imperial Parliament to assist also.

744. *Mr. Hutchison.*] What is the copra made from?—It is the kernel of the cocoanut, which is dried, and the oil is extracted from that.

745. *Mr. Stevens.*] You suggest, I think, that facilities should be given for the importation of manila fibre for rope-manufacture. Do you think, if manila were imported, we could procure labour here sufficiently cheap to make it into rope and sell it, at a profit, to the South Pacific or India?—I think the time is coming when labour will have to take its fair rate. I am looking five or ten years ahead. It is impossible for Parliament to keep wages above their proper level. A brisk foreign outward trade would send wages up, but Protection will keep wages down.

746. Taking the principal port in the East—Calcutta—what quantity do you think we could dispose of there?—I believe we could sell a certain amount of clothes-line much cheaper than manila if made of New Zealand flax.

*Mr. Stevens:* I have taken two of the finest samples of New Zealand flax to Calcutta, and have asked two ropemakers what quantity they would require, and one said 5 tons a year, and another 10 tons a year. I believe the amount of such sales would not pay for the postage on correspondence. All kinds of small ropes and lines are made there, and all rope used for shore purposes is made from jute, at a cost 50 per cent. less than we could possibly make it in New Zealand. There would be no hope of our competing with India in that respect.

*Witness:* I should like to say that I find, as our trade progresses amongst these islanders, that their cheap goods, such as jute rope, disappear before our superior ones, and they pay a larger amount for an article one would think they would not buy at all. With respect to jute rope, I think jute fibre rots quickly in salt water, and that it is not used by our royal or merchant navy. Its tensile strength is so poor that no one uses jute sewing-twine for wool-bales when other twine can be got: it breaks so easily. I should say that jute was good for baling and sacking, but not for rope.

747. *Mr. McGowan.*] Do you know anything as to the quality of the flour exported to the islands? Is it of the same quality as used in this colony?—The same, excepting an inferior flour supplied to the coolies in Fiji.

748. My experience is that the flour exported to the islands is very much inferior in quality to that used here. I refer to the exports from the Auckland mills; so if other countries are able to undersell us in the goods you mention it would be useless for us to attempt to compete with them in flour?—I do not think we can now, in the best flour, but we ought to be able to do so. Adelaide is a slightly drier flour, and may keep better than New Zealand, but in all the products of flour, such as biscuits, we ought to be able to compete.

749. *Mr. Mackenzie.*] I gather that the reason we are not doing the trade is because the existing service gives Sydney an advantage over us, and on account of the low port charges and low freights?—Yes.

750. That applies to goods brought from abroad to Sydney, and not to goods produced in Sydney as a rule?—Yes.

751. Therefore, with regard to our own products, you are of opinion that we can, with the exception of inferior flour, do as well as Sydney, and ought to?—Yes, as well as anywhere.

752. And, in order to develop that trade, we should not put duties on any articles required for the production of those goods we wish to export?—Yes.