

No. 39.

Mr. VOLLBRACHT to the Commissioners on Local Industry.

GENTLEMEN,—

Wellington, 5th June, 1880.

I beg to state, for the information of the Royal Commission on Local Industries, that I have examined some tobacco grown at Opotiki, and have compared it with samples of leaf tobacco grown in Victoria and New South Wales, and I find that it is 25 per cent. more valuable. The present price of colonial tobacco, wholesale (duty paid), is from 3s. to 3s. 6d.: it would cost from 1s. to 1s. 6d. per pound to cultivate and grow it; the manufacturing would cost about another shilling. It is therefore clear that if duty be charged on tobacco grown within the colony, it cannot possibly pay any one to grow it. I know of some land now under cultivation for growth of tobacco; and three persons of experience in such cultivation have arrived from America, intending to begin at once to plant. Unless the duty be removed, however, it cannot possibly pay any one to grow tobacco. And I would further suggest that a bonus of 1s. should be paid to licensed tobacco-manufacturers for every pound of imported tobacco manufactured by them in the colony during the years 1880–81, instead of 6d. as provided by section 12 of "The Tobacco Act, 1879;" and that no one should be permitted, without obtaining a license, to manufacture tobacco grown on his own property. I think that if persons are so permitted without being obliged to obtain a license, smuggling would be carried on to a large extent.

I have, &c.,

AUGUST VOLLBRACHT.

No. 40.

Mr. CHARLES HARRELL to the Royal Commission on Local Industries.

GENTLEMEN,—

Wellington, 15th July, 1880.

I respectfully beg leave to call your attention to a few of the clauses of the Tobacco Act of 1879—clauses that will prevent manufacturers from introducing tobacco-growing, and cigar and tobacco manufacturing, into the Colony of New Zealand. I submit a few amendments for your consideration: Reduction of license, reduction of duty on leaf grown in the colony, reduction of duty on imported leaf.

I have, &c.,

CHARLES HARRELL.

Clause 5.—A yearly license of £50 is a tax that will press unfairly upon the small manufacturers who may perhaps be engaged in only one branch of the business—that is, making cigars by hand-labour. Under such conditions they would lose about 20 per cent. of raw material through their inability to utilize the scraps, stems, and shorts from the cigar-tables, or the waste from badly-packed cases. On the other hand, the capitalists who are running large concerns fitted up with all the latest improvements in machinery for grinding, cutting, and pressing, work up all scraps and sweepings, and lose absolutely nothing—not even the sand that is brought from the fields in the leaf. Issue licenses monthly or quarterly. Ten shillings per month for each operator engaged in converting raw leaf tobacco into articles of consumption. Apprentices to serve the first year of their time free of license, after which they should be taxed.

Clause 7.—Let the applicant for a license enter into a bond himself in the sum of £500.

Clause 12.—The duty on cigars, cigarettes, tobacco, or snuff manufactured from tobacco grown in the Colony of New Zealand shall be 6d. per pound; the duty on imported leaf tobacco shall be 2s. per pound.

Manufacturers who may desire to produce a medium or superior class of goods will be obliged to use an equal quantity of local-grown and imported leaf—at least, I think so. I arrive at the above conclusion because I have never seen any leaf cultivated in any of these colonies that could be manufactured with satisfactory results unless with an admixture of imported tobacco.

Tobacco grown in the colonies from the best imported seed will require careful cultivation for a number of years before it becomes thoroughly acclimatized and equal in quality to the leaf produced in the country from whence the seed was obtained. Therefore a considerable time must elapse before the New Zealand planters will be able to shut out the imported manufactured goods or raw leaf. In the interim, manufacturers and growers should not be saddled with a prohibitive duty that prevents capitalists from investing their money and drives skilled labour out of the country. From what I have been told about the climate and soil of the east coast of this Island, it ought, as a tobacco-producing district, to take first place in this hemisphere.

A Few Words about the Cultivation of Tobacco.

The best samples of tobacco-leaf are grown only in the West Indian Islands. The next best is a leaf called Florida Havana, produced from Havana seed cultivated in the State of Florida. There are other kinds and qualities of tobacco grown, from Florida in the South to Vermont in the North.

Havana and Florida Havana would grow in favoured localities anywhere between the North Cape and the Bay of Islands; Maryland and Virginia leaf might be successfully cultivated anywhere from the Bay of Islands along the East Coast up to Hawke's Bay, or perhaps to Wellington; Pennsylvania seed-leaf could be located in Marlborough, and Connecticut seed in Nelson; Massachusetts seed in Canterbury and part of Otago.

The prices for American-grown leaf in America range from 12s. per pound for the southern-grown leaf, down to 2s. for the northern. One acre of new land of fair quality will yield about 1½ tons.

The very best Yarra leaf, cultivated on a few of the best plantations in the Island of Cuba, is worth, standing in the fields, 25s. per pound. In the cultivation of tobacco the greatest care should be, to keep the different kinds of plants separate from each other—for instance, Florida and Massachusetts should not be planted near each other.