

26. *Mr. Bain.*] Do you use much native timber?—Yes, a great deal. I may state we have upwards of fifty hands constantly manufacturing the goods required by our business: in fact, we sometimes have seventy—that is, when trade is good.

27. *Mr. Stevens.*] When you make furniture of colonial woods, do you find that you can compete with factories that employ labour-saving machines?—Yes.

28. Yet your system is different from theirs?—Yes. We even do a larger trade than they do—for this reason, people who have used the labour-saving-machine-made furniture once will never have it again.

29. *The Chairman.*] But these American chairs are made by machinery?—Yes; but in America, of course, the consumption is enormous, and machinery is brought to such perfection that it would take us many years before we were able to attain to similar perfection.

30. *Mr. Stevens.*] Do you import any portions of the furniture in a complete state, such as this table [shown]?—No.

31. *Mr. Bain.*] Rough and unpolished, I suppose?—Exactly.

32. Are table-legs made here?—They are made in their rough state at Home. We import them all. Everything else is done here. That is why we invite you, gentlemen, to come and see our warehouse—in order to satisfy you that furniture-importers do not, as some people suppose, import these goods direct from England or Scotland in a perfectly-finished state. It nearly requires as much labour here to put the goods into a finished state as to manufacture them altogether.

33. *Mr. Stevens.*] Is that course adopted because the risk of injury is less?—Of course the risk of injury is great if you import an article in a finished state. For instance, an article of this description [the card- and work-table] cannot be imported in a finished state, for the reason that in coming through the tropics the polish would be taken off by the heat, and it would need to be rescraped and repolished. The same thing applies to other classes of goods if you import them in a finished state. Another thing is that they would then take up immense bulk and generally get damaged.

34. *The Chairman.*] And freight must be enormously increased?—Yes.

35. So that, bringing them here in an unfinished state, you find that you can produce an article under much more favourable conditions than if imported in a complete state?—Oh, yes! We employ as much labour to finish the article here, and when it is finished it is as good to the consumer, as if it had been finished in the Home-country.

36. *Mr. Stevens.*] Now, as regards the duty, it used to be 10 per cent. nominally, now it is 15 per cent. What is your experience of the effect of that increase since it came into operation?—As we have said, we find that these additional duties limit the sale of goods; and, of course, that means limiting labour and everything connected with it. When the tariff was 11 per cent. or 10 per cent. we were perfectly contented. We do not wish it to be anything less than that. We think that that was fair to the revenue. All the years that we have been in business we never heard any one grumble about the price of goods when these charges were put upon them. But with the tariff at 16½ per cent., it paralyzes our business and cripples our trade. The more expensive articles, which come up to £20 or so, when these duties are put upon them come to be very heavy items indeed. Our wish is that you will lay before the House our objections to the present high rate of the tariff, and so recommend that the tariff should be brought down to its old rate; for which we shall feel grateful. You must recollect that, at whatever rate the tariff is put, of course the public—that is, the consumer—has to pay the difference. That is why I ask, why should this chair be obliged to be sold at 13s. when it can be got for 7s.?

37. *Mr. Bain.*] That chair is sold at 7s., you say?—It is imported at 7s., and it would cost us 13s. to make an inferior chair of the same sort.

38. *The Chairman.*] The chair is sold retail at about 10s. It would have to be sold, I suppose, at 17s. or 18s. if made here?—At 13s. with our profit added.

39. *Mr. Stevens.*] You think, then, that there is reason to complain that the 15 per cent. duty is restrictive, so far as the consumer is concerned?—Yes.

40. Consequently it restricts the labour that you would otherwise employ?—Yes. I may mention that Mr. Gillies represents the firm of Craig and Gillies, another large manufacturing firm and importer of goods in this town. We have consulted together, and he thoroughly indorses our remarks in this matter.

*Mr. Gillies:* Yes. I may add that we have been sixteen years in this town.

41. *The Chairman.*] I understand that both of your firms are large manufacturers of colonial furniture?—Yes.

42. You will see why I want to put this question, and its importance. I want to ascertain clearly whether the evidence you are now giving is given not entirely from the point of view of the importer?—It is not.

43. I suppose you manufacture almost as much colonial goods as you import?—Yes; but, of course, of a different class and style. I may mention that there are many classes of furniture which we make, and do not import. For instance, we never import chests of drawers, because we find we can manufacture good chests of drawers here and sell them as cheap as we can import them. Chiffoniers, wardrobes, tables, bedsteads—all kinds of things that we find it profitable to make, we do.

44. Can you tell us shortly, or can you distinguish between, the classes of manufactures you can make here and those you can more advantageously to your trade import?—The class we have made is confined strictly to New Zealand woods and cedar. We find that it is impossible to make the best class of work out of those kinds of woods. For instance, you gentlemen would not like to have your dining-room furniture made of kauri, which is a bed-room wood. No gentleman would have his dining-room furniture made of it. That is the distinction between colonial-made and imported goods. We have to import goods of a more finished nature. They are of a different style altogether.

45. *The Chairman.*] Of a more durable kind, too?—Yes.

46. *Mr. Bain.*] Could you make chairs like that without oak?—Yes, we have made them; but we cannot make them like that. We cannot make them so durable, because we have not the timber. We must import the oak and leather-bindings in order to make them.