

collect as much written information as they could concerning local industries generally, and to supplement it by means of particular inquiry as far as time would allow. With this object, they addressed a circular-letter, inviting information and co-operation, to the Chairmen of the County Councils, the Mayors of the principal Boroughs, the Chambers of Commerce, the Agricultural and Pastoral Associations, and to all Associations and persons that they deemed likely to be interested in the subject of the inquiry. It will be seen, from the papers appended to the report, that many of those to whom the circular-letter was addressed, cordially responded to the invitation of the Commission and rendered valuable assistance to them in their work. The Commissioners desire to convey their thanks to these gentlemen for their co-operation, and to express their disappointment that others—who, from their public position and intimate acquaintance with many matters connected with the industries of the country, might have similarly aided them in an important degree—did not choose to take any action of the kind.

The Commissioners discerned at the outset, what indeed must be discerned by every observer, that the great staple industries of the country, upon which it mainly depends for its wealth, and upon which its people mainly depend for their subsistence, are too firmly established to need any assistance from the Government, however capable they may be of extension or improvement by the ingenuity and enterprise of those who are engaged in them. It appeared to the Commission, nevertheless, in the course of their inquiry, that much injury might be done to these great industries, as well as others less fully developed, by capricious alterations of the fiscal laws, which, as they stand, are favourable to the development of those natural resources of the country which come within the scope of the simpler processes of settlement. It will be seen, from the evidence and various communications received by the Commission, that the views of those who deem themselves most directly affected by this question are singularly contradictory. Many persons, who, from the confidence with which they have invested large capital in their ventures, and from the wide experience which they claim to possess of the operation of commercial laws, might be assumed to be authorities upon the subject, urge the desirability of imposing protective or even prohibitive duties upon manufactured articles, or upon articles which they allege can be produced in the colony. Others again, engaged in precisely the same trades, and appearing to be equally capable of arriving at a sound judgment, advocate exactly the opposite course. The promoters of some local industries ask for protective duties on the particular articles which they produce, whilst other promoters of local industries show that protective duties on those very articles would inevitably crush their hopes of success. It is impossible, however, to disguise the fact, which is, indeed, frankly admitted in some instances, that those who make these representations are actuated more by the natural desire to widen the proportions and increase the profits of their own occupations than by any other consideration. The Commission are aware that a large and vexed question of policy, closely affecting the revenue, and extending to all branches of the public administration, is involved in this part of their subject. With that question of policy they do not consider it their duty to deal. They think it right, nevertheless, to state that they are satisfied the effect of the existing Customs tariff is distinctly though inequitably protective, inasmuch as it affords artificial advantages to particular industries by limiting the market of those who are dependent on them for their supplies. This is conclusively proved by the exceptionally high rate of wages which prevails in those industries, and by the rapid diminution of the imports of the class of articles which they produce. How far, or in what manner, this result affects other industries does not yet very clearly appear; but there is no doubt that, in the nascent stage of the industrial energies of the colony, there is every danger of the protection of one trade proving detrimental, if not positively destructive, to others. The Commission would, therefore, recommend that great caution should be exercised in making any changes in the Customs tariff, except, of course, for revenue purposes, lest, for the sake of hastening the prosperity of a particular industry, or affording special advantages to a particular section of the community, a blow should be unintentionally, but none the less effectually, struck at other industries in the prosperity of which