

is creating considerable alarm, as it is seriously affecting the extensive traffic in this source of wealth. This feeling has caused a public expression to be given by the people of New Westminster for an application to the Dominion Government for a grant to erect a salmon-breeding establishment upon a large scale on the Fraser River. This application will no doubt be laid before your department, and will receive that consideration which its importance demands. A suggestion is, however, here offered: that, whilst heartily acquiescing in the wish of the inhabitants of British Columbia in having a salmon-breeding establishment to assist in retaining the stock of fish that at present exists there, it is of equal necessity also that a policy for the preservation and protection of fish, by setting aside close-seasons for their natural reproduction, should be stringently enforced."

HAT TRADE.

No. 103.

Evidence of Mr. MASTERS, hat-manufacturer, before the Commissioners on Local Industries, at Dunedin, 18th May, 1880.

I MAY say that there are five or six hat-makers in the town; yet there are several men walking about the town literally starving. We want a measurement duty, to place us on a par with Victoria. If we had a measurement duty we could employ three or four times as many men as we do now. At the present time we can sell to the retailers, but we cannot sell to the importers, who send Home for fifty or sixty dozen hats at a time. We must have a higher duty put on, which would have the effect of causing them to buy from us; and naturally we would be able to employ a great many more hands. At the present time the master hatters of Dunedin are in a miserable condition; they are barely making a living—indeed, with some of us, it is as much as we can do to make a bare living; the wages we have to pay are considerably more than at Home—three times as much, in fact. We would like the duty to be at 4s. per foot, as it originally was. I think the tariff in Victoria at the present time is 25 per cent. If we got 25 per cent., or 4s. per foot, hat-making in this colony would become a very large and important industry.

134. *Mr. Stevens.*] Are you aware that the depressed condition of the hat-manufacturing trade in this place is not in existence in the other parts of the colony?—In Wellington, Christchurch, or Auckland they do not import hats so largely as we do in Dunedin. The large warehouses here import hats in quantities. In England there is six months of what we call the busy season, and there is six months of bad season. It is in this bad season that the importers go to the factories at Home and get them to manufacture a lot of hats, which are sent out here only if they can just clear expenses. Of course we cannot compete with that.

135. I suppose it pays them to import?—Yes.

136. How is it that Dunedin is so specially favoured with a flood of hats, as you say it is?—I cannot tell you how it is, but I know it is the fact, for all the warehouses in the place are overstocked with hats. If we offer our hats to the retailers they say, "No; we can buy the article a little cheaper from the importers." We can supply the retailers, if you give us some amount of encouragement to our business, but we cannot compete with the importers with the tariff as it now stands.

137. *Mr. Bain.*] I suppose that the quality of your manufactures is equal to that of the imported article?—At the present time I am manufacturing hats for a wholesale house in Dunedin, which are being sold here as made by Lincoln and Bennett, a well-known London firm. The reason I got the order was that the house I have mentioned ran out of hats.

138. Have you attempted to make felt, seeing the quantities of rabbit-skins we can get?—That would take a very large amount of capital. It would cost £10,000 to go into it properly, which the colony is not large enough to warrant.

139. As much as that?—To go into it and get the requisite machinery it would cost quite £10,000.

140. Then, apparently, what you complain of is the want of patriotism here in the people not encouraging native manufactures. They buy the imported article at a cheaper rate than it can be produced here for?—We can sell a hat that is as good, if not better, than the imported article; and the consumer has to pay actually the same amount as if he came to us to purchase. We can sell our hats to the drapers; but we cannot sell to the importers, who get a quantity of hats out from England during the slack season of the Home market, when trade there is slack.

141. What is the rate of wages paid here compared with what is paid at Home?—About three times as much. I know that for work that I paid 10s. in the Home-country I have to pay here 24s.; and for what I paid 2s. 6d. in the old country I have here to pay 9s.

142. Then do I understand that the men prefer to walk about rather than accept a reduction?—They would be quite willing to take a reduction, but there is no work.

143. If you get hats produced at a cheaper rate, could you not sell them cheaper?—We cannot sell them to the importer cheap enough. As I have said, they go into the English market when trade is depressed, and buy. We cannot compete with them. But if there was a heavier duty the importers would have to come to us; and the public would get their hats at the same price as they do now.

144. Has no attempt been made to manufacture felts here?—One or two took up the thing, but it was a failure.

145. Cannot you make a living by it?—No; it requires a great amount of machinery. I am prepared to get out the machinery for blocking the stiffened felt, which would cost about £500, but not the apparatus for manufacturing felts.

146. *The Chairman.*] I suppose that you really make a better class of goods, as a general rule, than those sent out—that they send out an inferior article and undersell you?—Yes.

147. The imported articles are mostly stiffened hoods?—Yes; whereas we make what are called "pullovers."