

In May last I obtained from the War Office and forwarded to you invitation to tender for a three-years supply of frozen meat required for His Majesty's troops stationed at Gibraltar.

*Preserved Milk.*

I have also brought under the notice of the War Office preserved milk prepared in New Zealand, and submitted samples, but as it was sweetened the War Office did not order any.

*Hay.*

As early as September, 1899, I called the attention of the War Office to the fact that New Zealand could supply hay of superior quality, but it was not until an offer was made through the Government to supply 100 tons as a trial shipment that the War Office decided to obtain a supply. This order was increased to 250 tons, but the War Office declined to give any further orders until the receipt of the report of the General Officer commanding at Cape Town as regards this trial shipment.

*Tinned Meats.*

I also brought under the notice of the War Office New Zealand tinned meats, and offers were invited for the supply of the same. The tenders sent in were, however, not accepted, except in the instance when 100,000 lb. of corned mutton were ordered.

The difficulty to which I have already referred—viz., the inability of the War Office to give sufficient time for the transmission of the tenders from the colony—existed in this as in other cases.

*Horses.*

Early in 1901 I placed myself in communication with the War Office as regards the obtaining of horses from New Zealand for the Imperial troops in South Africa, and I was informed that it was understood that, as a rule, the country was too valuable to run horses on it. I thereupon had an interview with the officer at the head of the Imperial Remounts Department, and obtained from him particulars as regards the horses required, and I cabled these particulars to the Government; and after further correspondence the War Office authorised the officer purchasing horses for the Imperial Government in Australia to proceed to New Zealand and purchase five hundred to one thousand horses, and I understand that under these instructions seven hundred horses were purchased and shipped to South Africa by the s.s. "Cornwall."

I also called the attention of the War Office to the fact that a large number of horses suitable for field artillery and for the Army Service Corps were obtainable in New Zealand at prices ranging from £25 to £30 per head f.o.b. New Zealand; but, in reply, I was informed that such horses were not required, as animals of that class were readily obtainable in the United Kingdom.

*Coal.*

Some time ago I was in communication with the India Office respecting supply of New Zealand steam coal, of which 5,000 tons were required for Bombay and 2,500 tons for Muscat, and an offer was obtained through you from the Blackball Company to supply the same, delivered at Wellington, as the company could not supply a steamer so as to give delivery at the ports named. On submitting, however, this offer to the India Office I was informed that the Government of India had decided to defer the purchase of coal for the present.

I am at present, under your instructions, in communication with the Admiralty as regards the coal purchased by that Imperial Department at Westport, in respect to the Government's offer to undertake, through the Department of Industries and Commerce, the work of inspecting the coal, checking weights, and facilitating the despatch of the steamers taking it to its destination.

In conclusion, I may say that, to obtain a fair share of Imperial Government orders, constant effort is necessary, and to succeed it is essential that the Imperial Departments be furnished periodically with accurate information as to the price, quality, &c., of the produce which it is in the power of the colony to supply.

I am aware that it is occasionally asserted in the colony that a commercial agent, or a man with commercial training, might have done more in obtaining the patronage of the Imperial Government than I have been able to do. Into the general question of appointing one or more commercial agents to act for New Zealand here I will not enter in this letter, but I should like to point out that certain writers in the colony seem to be under a misapprehension as to the position which a Government commercial agent would have taken up in reference to supplies for South Africa. They seem to imagine that such an officer could have acted exactly like the agent for a private firm. That, however, he could not have done. There has all along been the difference that, whereas a private agent can quote prices for specified quantities of produce and make firm offers, the Government agent is not in a position to do that. Until some means are devised—if they can be devised—for enabling a Government agent to do this, he will always be severely handicapped in comparison with the agent of a large private firm or syndicate.

I have, &c.,

The Right Hon. the Premier, Wellington, New Zealand.

W. P. REEVES.

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