

IMPORT STATISTICS.

From the facts thus briefly set out it will be apparent that, although New Zealand is still comparatively a small State, it yet constitutes a market which is of considerable importance, is steadily developing, and offers great possibilities for the near future. It is therefore worthy of the most careful consideration by English manufacturers and merchants. At present British trade has a great pre-eminence in the Dominion, but it is encountering considerable and active competition from foreign countries. The tables on the opposite page show the shares of the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth of Australia, all other British possessions, the United States, and other foreign countries in the import trade of New Zealand in the sixteen years from 1891 to 1906, both in actual amounts and in percentages.

The most noticeable features of these tables are (a) the marked increase—amounting to 15·4 per cent. of the total imports in 1906 as compared with those of the previous year; (b) the nearly equal increase—14·6 per cent.—in the imports from the United Kingdom; (c) the fact that to the British Empire no less than 84 per cent. of the total import trade is credited, which is a slightly higher percentage than in any one of the previous five years; and (d) the remarkable steadiness of the proportion assigned to the United Kingdom, which has been 62 per cent. in each of the years 1903 to 1906, inclusive.

In regard to these tables, however, it is necessary to bear carefully in mind the presence of the difficulty arising from the well-known confusion between “countries of origin” and “countries of shipment,” as, except in the case of goods belonging to classes to which the provisions of “The Preferential and Reciprocal Trade Act, 1903,” apply, there is no necessity for an exact statement on the part of importers as to the origin of goods brought into the country. Goods from the countries of continental Europe go to New Zealand in the main either through the United Kingdom or through Australia (there is direct transit from the United States); and the consequence is that the trade statistics are affected in two ways: (a) the imports stated to be from the United Kingdom include a certain amount of foreign goods originally shipped from the Continent of Europe to the United Kingdom and subsequently despatched to New Zealand—which for various reasons do not appear in the United Kingdom returns as re-exports; and, (b) imports described as coming from Australia include goods from the Continent of Europe, from the United Kingdom, and from elsewhere, which were consigned originally to Australian ports. The following table shows the exports from the United Kingdom to New Zealand as given in the United Kingdom Trade Returns for the five years 1902 to 1906, distinguishing between the produce and manufactures of the United Kingdom and foreign or colonial produce and manufactures re-exported; it will be remembered that these values are f.o.b., whereas those in the table for New Zealand imports given above are c.i.f. :—

Year.					British and Irish Produce exported to New Zealand.	Re-exports to New Zealand.	Total Exports from United Kingdom to New Zealand.
					£	£	£
1902	..	..	..	..	5,676,576	481,309	6,158,885
1903	..	..	..	..	6,361,390	593,430	6,954,820
1904	..	..	..	..	6,315,090	582,330	6,897,420
1905	..	..	..	..	6,425,793	569,013	6,994,806
1906	..	..	..	..	7,400,188	652,288	8,052,476

These figures only confirm that impression of the steadiness of British trade with New Zealand in recent years which was given by the detailed table of New Zealand imports previously set out. In 1902 the percentage of re-exports in the total exports from the United Kingdom to New Zealand was 7·8; in the following year it rose to 8·5, but dropped in 1904 to 8·4, and for the last two years it has been 8·1. It may therefore be regarded as clearly established by the two tables that the United Kingdom has in the last five years fully held its own, and maintained its position in the Dominion market. Against the deduction of foreign goods which must be made from the New Zealand import figures in order to arrive at the imports which were actually of United Kingdom origin must be set that part of the imports from Australia, undoubtedly considerable, which are really also of United Kingdom origin and have been re-exported from the Commonwealth. On the whole, therefore, it may reasonably be assumed that any readjustment of the figures based on exact information as to countries of origin would not seriously affect the percentages of the New Zealand import trade assigned to the United Kingdom in the detailed table given above, but would increase the percentages assigned to foreign countries and diminish that of the Commonwealth of Australia. Some further modification would, however, be necessitated by the fact that some part of the imports credited to the United States should in reality be assigned to Canada. Moreover, it is to be observed that the import of steamers for coastal and intercolonial traffic is not recorded in the general New Zealand trade statistics (this was the case also in Australia until 1906). From information furnished by companies concerned, it appears that the total value of such steamers imported during the fifteen years 1890 to 1905 was about £1,600,000. This gives an average annual import of over £106,000 for the whole period, but for the nine years 1897 to 1905, during which the vessels acquired for this coasting and intercolonial trade have been both more numerous and of greater tonnage, the average value per annum has been considerably greater. These imports have been without exception of purely British origin, and the effect of the omission is to detract somewhat from the volume and value of the imports from the United Kingdom.