

The extent of our export trade to west-coast ports may be appreciated by a presentation of the total quantities of staple articles sent during the four years 1904-7, which are as under :—

Mutton	223,184 carcasses.
Lamb	1,067,121 „
Boned beef	128,198 boxes.
Rabbits	214,597 crates.
Butter	152,973 boxes.
Cheese	75,033 cases.

There is here a volume of business that is highly creditable to the enterprise of the shipping companies and of the west-coast merchants. It is a remarkable achievement to have built up such an extensive trade in four years; but these results are but an earnest of much greater things to be accomplished when the steamer service is improved, and steady and consistent effort is devoted to the development of the west-coast markets. It is not too much to say that in a few years the trade could be doubled if proper exertions are put forth and if a more rapid and regular service of steamers is secured. The service is, in a sense, still in its infancy, but it has more than justified its existence, and I am confident that a great expansion of trade to the west-coast ports will follow upon action to improve New Zealand's connection with these extensive and lucrative markets.

CONCLUSIONS.

It will be noted that British importers are practically unanimous in the opinion that the trade in our staple products with British west-coast ports is capable of very great expansion, and my personal observation leads me to emphatically indorse this view. In the western, and more especially in the north-western, counties of Great Britain there is a teeming population, consuming large quantities of foodstuffs. These articles of consumption include heavy imports of New Zealand meat and dairy-produce, of which a large proportion reaches the wholesale merchants by way of London. This roundabout method of delivery not only adds to the cost of the goods, but also leads to deterioration through unnecessary handling and the risks and delays of transit. It is palpable that, by direct delivery, the merchants in the west-coast cities will obtain such goods as meat, rabbits, butter, and cheese at a cheaper rate and in better condition, and that the advantage gained will be shared by the New Zealand producers. The question of how to increase the direct trade between this country and the west-coast ports of Great Britain is, therefore, one that immediately concerns all our producers, and in fact our whole population, because any increase of trade or enhancement of prices has a beneficial effect upon the general prosperity.

Without a single exception, all the west-coast merchants who handle New Zealand produce declare that the first essential to a rapid development of business is an improved steamer service—not necessarily faster vessels, but greater frequency and regularity in the running. The second point that they almost unanimously insist upon is that foodstuffs should be sent upon consignment. These and several other points I shall deal with in detail later on, discriminating between what can be done by private initiative and what can be best achieved by State action. The west-coast trade has grown at a fairly rapid rate since its inception some four years ago, and it is doubtless true that, by a process of natural development, it would, without any extraneous aid, assume year by year larger proportions, until commercial requirements would be such as to compel a more frequent and regular service of steamers. But in these strenuous days, when business competition is keen, people have not patience to wait “the long results of time,” and their interest forces them to adopt measures that will enable them to keep pace with their rivals in trade.

1. THE BEST WEST-COAST MARKETS.

Of the five ports embraced in the west-coast service, it seems to me that Bristol, Manchester, and Glasgow are the three that offer the best field for the expansion of our trade, as well as for the diversion of a proportion of the business now conducted through London. In Bristol we have a most advantageously situated distributing centre, with well-organized businesses for dealing with foodstuffs. The city occupies a dominating position for supplying meat and other provisions to the south-west of England, South Wales, and the Midlands. Within a radius of a hundred miles from the city there is a population of nine millions and a half, which can be more economically served through Bristol than through any other ocean port. The municipal authorities, who own and control the harbour and docks, have provided ample accommodation for the largest steamers, also refrigerated transit-sheds, cold-stores, grain-elevators, and other appliances of the most approved construction, while the facilities for the rapid forwarding of goods by rail are unsurpassed anywhere. By a combination of municipal and commercial enterprise the trade of Bristol has progressed by leaps and bounds during the last two decades, and the limit of its expansion has by no means been reached. Apart from the growth that may be expected in the future, we have to consider those branches of business in which New Zealand has at present a fair prospect of competing successfully with rival producing countries—as, for instance, with Canada for the supplying of butter and cheese, and with the Argentine Republic for the supplying of mutton and lamb. Splendid work has been done in the way of establishing a market for New Zealand mutton and lamb in Bristol, through an agency started by the Christchurch Meat Company, under the management of Mr. W. J. Kent, and the fruits of this pioneering effort may be shared in by all the meat-exporting organizations. Bristol is a very large consumer of butter and cheese, and, since Canada has practically ceased exporting butter, a most promising market offers for our product. New Zealand cheese has obtained a good foothold; and, as its texture and quality are pleasing to consumers in the south-west of England, there is reason to believe that it