

make the port attractive to shippers; and the Corporation recently obtained the necessary parliamentary powers to enable it to still further assist the development of the overseas trade by the granting of special terms in regard to accommodation and the modification of dues for a term of years.

TRADE IN NEW ZEALAND PRODUCE.

Opinions of Importers.

The principal of one of the leading firms importing New Zealand produce stated the advantages of the west-coast steamboat service thus:

- (1.) Saving of cost of railage from London.
- (2.) Cheaper landing-charges, which are at Bristol 1s. 6d. per ton, against 10s. 6d. per ton at London.
- (3.) Despatch in discharging; the time taken at Bristol being two to three days, against seven to fourteen days at London.

Against this has to be placed the irregularity of departures from New Zealand, which causes merchants to be always in a state of doubt as to when their goods will arrive. The time consumed on the journey does not so much matter, as, owing to the smarter despatch at Avonmouth, merchants get possession of goods quite as quickly as *via* London. The ideal times for steamers to arrive at Avonmouth are as follow: The first steamer of the season should arrive in the first or second week of December. Later boats (November to April sailings) to arrive between the 14th and 24th of each month from January to June. The July-to-November arrivals are not so important. It would be better still if the service were fortnightly, as merchants have to pay the factories fortnightly, and under existing arrangements have to lie out of their money longer, incurring interest charges.

Cheese.—His firm had this year imported about ten times more than in any previous year, and yet had not enough. The quality of New Zealand cheese had been more suitable for the west of England than formerly. They want a fairly well ripened cheese, pale in colour, with close, fat, buttery curd—close and free from holes. New Zealand cheese had been rather “holey” this season. They do not like a tough, hard curd, even if clean in flavour. New Zealand cheese have to compete with Canadian, which are made in September and have had time to mature. The demand for New Zealand drops off towards the end of June, and continues to get less during July, with, as a rule, a corresponding fall in value. The shrinkage in New Zealand cheese seemed heavier than usual this season, many crates showing 6 lb. to 8 lb. loss compared with marked weights.

Butter.—The quality of New Zealand butter this year, taken as a whole, they consider not quite equal to last season’s—any butter not disposed of soon after landing quickly losing its freshness. Despite this and the fairly large quantities brought by direct steamers, Bristol and Cardiff merchants have had to draw heavily from other markets. With regard to dairy and milled butters, although they had this year, with a view to supporting the west-coast line, imported fairly large quantities of both descriptions, and had found an excellent demand, they are afraid that, owing to variations in quality, and the recognised difficulties in the way of obtaining sufficiently close grading in New Zealand, they must look to getting these on a consignment basis in future.

Prejudice and False Description.—A gentleman informed me that New Zealand butter and cheese are frequently sold as English, which is rendered necessary by the prejudice of the consumers, who would not buy the goods if sold as “New Zealand.” Yet another gentleman made the naive admission that large quantities of New Zealand and other butter are milled in a factory near Bristol, put up in pats, and placed on the market as English, Irish, Canadian, or New Zealand, “according to the season.”

The manager of a large distributing concern stated that New Zealand cheese suits the taste of the people of the west of England better than Canadian; but, nevertheless, his total trade in it is only one-tenth of his trade in Canadian.

In the opinion of a wholesale dealer in colonial dairy-produce, monthly steamers are not yet frequent enough, but at present there is not sufficient business to warrant a fortnightly service. Bristol merchants would be satisfied with a monthly service if the sailing-dates were rigidly adhered to and fast steamers were engaged in it, doing the journey from New Zealand in forty-two to forty-five days. A monthly service is not, however, of much use in the butter trade, but it would be a distinct advantage to have that description of produce shipped direct to Bristol instead of going through London. He recognised that it would take time to break down existing trade connections and methods. If the west-coast service were made equal to that of London the trade would very soon be diverted. There should also be a guarantee that certain things would be done to protect merchants against losses. He preferred the Canadian system of selling butter week by week. Australians ship largely on consignment, being of opinion that in this way they realised better prices than they would do if they sold right out; but his own view was that they would get higher prices if they sold. The practice of sending on consignment encourages the clearing of lots at a sacrifice, thus disorganizing the market. New Zealand cheese at this time of the year (May) fetches a price nearly equal to Canadian. With regard to butter-blending, he thought it would be better if the practice were prohibited altogether. There is no reason for blending, as the New Zealand butter is pure and wholesome. The new Butter Bill in England will, in his opinion, make matters worse than at present, as it will legalise the sale of imitation butter, which under the old law was illegal.

The managing director of a company very extensively engaged in the importation of New Zealand dairy-produce complained bitterly of the irregular running of the steamers in the west-coast trade. His company had suffered hundreds of pounds’ loss from that cause. Goods that