

for them. I may add that we make many thousands of pairs of evening shoes still at about 6s. 6d. a pair.

30. There is no common understanding between boot-manufacturers in regard to prices?—Not the slightest—good cut-throat competition the whole time. I may here say that one firm paid 2s. in the pound, and another firm 6½d., and they had £12,000 of liabilities. I think that lately the public has been getting some cheap stuff. I have never known the time when it was not so.

31. *Dr. Hight.*] You spoke of the introduction of better machinery during the last fifteen years. What was the cause of that: was it in any degree due to the higher wages, or simply in sympathy with the introduction of better machinery abroad, and the general progress?—We had to compete with the rest of the world and employ the most modern means of turning out the articles.

32. Do you find that the introduction of better machinery has some effect in raising the rate of wages?—We are paying higher wages, and we are turning out boots at no increased cost. If the wages had not been increased we should have manufactured at a cheaper cost—that is a certainty. The increase we pay in wages has absorbed some of the advantages of the machinery.

33. You spoke of the demand for a better quality of boots: can you suggest any particular causes for the increase in the quality demanded beyond the one you mentioned—the increased prosperity of the people?—No, I think it is that, and I think it is due also to the growth of the cities, and there being more life and smartness about them. Twenty-five years ago the place was much more countrified than now, but as the cities develop the people get smarter, and their wants are more in accordance with what the city expects.

34. They are better able to satisfy their wants than they were formerly?—Yes, undoubtedly.

35. You are of opinion that the capricious changes in fashion affect trade?—I think they are very good for the traders—the draper and tailor, and all those people. I think the fashion is everything to them. It is costly for the householder.

36. Is there any great loss of dead stock from that cause?—Yes, a good deal—a very heavy loss at times.

37. Can you distinguish between the classes of the community as regards devotion to fashion?—No, I do not think there is any class in it. I believe the classes are eliminated in that matter.

38. You think that changes of fashion are followed by what are commonly called “the workers” as well as by other classes of the community?—I think they are. I think the bulk of the people are affected by the fashions. There are a few exceptions where every shilling is of importance, and where the expenditure is closely studied, but speaking of the great bulk of the people I think they are all actuated by the same feeling.

39. You think that fair competition with foreign lines is good for the producer?—Now you are getting on to another subject altogether. If we were discussing tariff there is a great deal to be said on both sides of that subject. I dare say from the point of view of the public it is a good thing that there should be some competition—it keeps us up to the mark.

40. From the point of view of the general community?—Yes; if you were to sweep the tariff entirely away you would get cheaper boots—that there is no doubt about; but it would mean closing every factory in New Zealand in six months without a doubt.

41. But your idea of a satisfactory tariff is this: that the local producer should be put on the same footing as the foreign producer in our local markets?—Yes.

42. A tariff conforming to those conditions would be satisfactory to you?—I would like it a little better in some respects.

43. You spoke of the scarcity of female labour: have you any suggestions for remedying that?—I think the only suggestion is to import them. The local demand is very large, and girls are marrying very rapidly. We lost fifteen girls from our place one Christmas season. It was a great loss—fifteen expert girls. We cannot object to it; on the contrary, we must approve of it.

44. Is there any special plan of importation that you would suggest?—Our firm imported twenty girls some time ago, but they are nearly all gone—nearly all married. We lost nearly every girl that we imported in three years. I think we did the country some service, for we paid their passages, or some portion of them, and some portion was repaid. There is no doubt that we could do with a steady influx of female labour without injuring any one.

45. *Mr. Robertson.*] You have spoken about the increased standard of quality in demand for boots. Did you say that the average quality of women’s boots is as good now as it was fifteen years ago?—I think it is. But you have always this fact to consider in regard to women’s boots: if you go in for a class of boot that is smart and light, perhaps they will not give the same amount of wear as a stronger and rougher class of boot; but taking the quality all round I think it was never better than it is to-day.

46. Do you think that more boots are sold per head of the population now than there were fifteen years ago?—I would not think so.

47. Do you not think that the changes of fashion and devotion to fashion causes a greater sale of boots per head of the population?—I am not clear on that point—whether more per head are sold. Probably there are more per head sold. If people demand the better stuff they are also perhaps not wearing them out in the way they formerly did, for the same reason.

48. *Dr. Hight.*] You said that competition was pretty keen amongst the local producers: about how many plants are there in the Dominion?—I think, about twenty-five or thirty.

49. Suppose they were amalgamated—would it be possible to combine them, or the greater portion of them?—It would not be practicable. They are spread all over New Zealand, from Invercargill to Auckland. New Zealand is a place of very varied wants. The class of goods required in Invercargill is quite different from the class of goods required in Napier or Auckland.