

The Commercial

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TRADE WITH AUSTRALIA.

FROM A BRITISH COLUMBIA POINT OF VIEW.

(Written for The Commercial.)

The Canadian-Australian trade has reached the interesting age, in its infancy, it is a vigorous youngster, but if its development is not aided by some sort of policy for the free exchange of natural products between the two British dependencies, it may never arrive at full maturity, or overtaken by reverses barely exist as a pampered offspring of Canadian enterprise.

Schemes to stimulate trade between Canada and Australia have been frequently mooted, but it is with the practical results of the trade as it exists that this article has to deal. As it is a question of the gravest importance and the widest interest, it would be safer not to trust entirely to the judgment of any one, but present a composite opinion, as it were, of a score of authorities, directly or indirectly interested in developing trade between the two countries. To this end many trans-Pacific exporters and importers were interviewed. All agree on one point that the high duties are an almost insurmountable obstacle to the healthy expansion of the trade. To the present time the balance of trade has been with Canada. We seem to have more readily conformed to the demands of the Australian consumers, than Australian exporters have with ours. Whether it is that we are more fastidious or have more markets to choose from, is hard to say. It is the case that many trial importations from Australia have proved partial failures, while almost everything sent from Canada has met with ready sale.

In spite of duty and freight rates, comparatively large shipments of machinery manufactured in Canada have gone to the land of the kangaroo, and by almost every steamer prominent Canadian manufacturers are among the passengers, travelling to Australia to introduce our famous goods in the trans-Pacific market. A number of cars of agricultural implements have also been shipped from Ontario, and sold in the Australian markets. It seems probable that this branch of our trade will become important and be a question of interest to all Canadian manufacturers. Perhaps the best feature of the trade at the present time from a British Columbia standpoint is the rapidly growing demand for our salmon in Australia; it is only a question of educating the taste of the Antipodeans before our shipments of salmon will treble and quadruple present exports. British Columbia is the only supply market for salmon for Australia. This branch of trade, however, will never reach the enormous dimensions prophesied until the commodity is admitted free.

Among other articles of export are boxes in shooks, ready to put together, for packing fruit, these are sent to Honolulu as well as

Australia. In 1891 shipments of this box wood from Vancouver, B. C., in the aggregate amounted to quite a respectable industry in itself. Australian firms who handle these shooks claim they come too high but they continue to order them. Pickets, laths and lumber are also going forward in sample lots by each steamer. This branch of the trade however has not reached any dimensions yet.

It is interesting to note that while a considerable fleet of vessels are carrying lumber from Westminster to the Sound and San Francisco, there are ten cargoes of lumber to go forward from Puget Sound to Australia to one going forward from this province to Australia. There are several reasons given for this. The United States vessels are owned by the shippers and are built especially for the trade, which reduces the carrying charges below what can be quoted in British Columbia. Another reason is that the United States firms have live agents throughout Australia continually canvassing the buyers and checking possible competition. It is very certain that lumber cannot be produced any cheaper than in this province and the Puget Sound article is notoriously known to be inferior to that shipped from British Columbia.

Large shipments of grain, flour and feed go forward from Puget Sound via the Canadian-Australian line to Honolulu. But these commodities cannot be shipped directly from here to Honolulu with profit owing to the preferential trade relations existing between Hawaii and the United States as against Canada. As a diversion of trade, however, the shipment of the United States article is of great assistance to the Australian line and of indirect benefit to Canada. On nearly every trip the Canadian-Australian steamers take as much flour, feed and grain to Honolulu as can be conveniently handled.

Australians are large hop buyers and an experimental shipment of B. C. hops met with great favor among the Australian purchasers and brought a fair price. It is possible that this province may develop a large trade with Australia in hops for we grow as good an article in this line as any country in the world; but our export hop trade is in its incipient stage and can only be spoken of problematically.

Last year there was a dearth of potatoes and onions in Australia and consignments shipped from here were eagerly bought up, but these shipments would only be profitable in bad seasons. Large consignments of paper are also being sent to Australia by the Canadian route from the Everett, Washington, mills. The business of the Everett mill with Australia is constantly increasing. In this connection it is expected that at some future date the Alberni, B. C. mills will be able to give satisfactory quotations to Australian buyers for good quality paper. In fact, it is understood that the company are at present figuring on exporting large lots of paper across the Pacific. These lines comprise our chief exports. In return we get large consignments of tropical fruits from Honolulu, which previous to the inauguration of the present

Canadian-Australian line came by way of San Francisco. Besides this, heavy shipments of wool and other articles of merchandise, previously shipped via San Francisco, now come by the Canadian route and are shipped over the Canadian railroad to Boston, New York and other United States points. This very considerable diversion of trade from the States is to the present time the most important feature of the trade this way. For articles shipped directly to British Columbia there will not be a great demand until the population increases very much, and heavy freight charges for long hauls exclude them from eastern Canada and the States. A better idea can be gained by distinctly mentioning some of the articles imported and their fate in the British Columbia markets. Australian canned meats have been an entire success in British Columbia and what is more gratifying they have shut out the United States article which previously entirely supplied the market. The Australian meats are not put up so neatly as those imported from the States, but are equally good in quality and can be sold more cheaply to the consumer. Another advantage is, the prices are uniform the year around. On the other hand, Australian butter has not been a success. It comes in boxes for immediate use and cannot be kept any length of time. Some of the consignments have been good, others of indifferent quality; about a carload altogether has been shipped.

Manitoba is the natural supply of British Columbia for dairy produce and it is doubtful if Australia will ever be able to compete in quality or price with the Winnipeg shippers. Even if the high duty were removed from the Australian butter it would be an even race and all things being equal buyers would prefer dealing with Winnipeg. In March, April and May, however, when Manitoba butter is not shipped to British Columbia, the best Australian butter reaches this market and if it can be bought at the right price is a great boon to this province.

The price of Australian butter is regulated by what it will bring in the London market. If it bring 18 cents in London the British Columbia buyer must add two cents for freight and four cents for duty to arrive at what it will cost him to lay it down in Vancouver. Butter is not always as low as 18 cents in the London market, so that the duty in this instance is a great drawback to the Australian butter trade in this province. A consignment recently laid down in Vancouver for 24 cents could not be sold for 25 cents because a better article was procurable in Winnipeg at the same figure.

It is very doubtful if the frozen mutton trade will prove a success. It was popular at first, although the local butchers set their faces against the innovation. Everyone wanted to try it and there was not enough to go around, but the novelty of the thing has worn off and hard times has compelled the ranchers in the United States to sell their sheep and wool at almost anything they will bring. As a consequence, Australian mutton is not meeting with such a ready sale, as butchers