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THE TRANSACTIONS
OF THE
South African Philosophical Society.

VIII. *Some Comparative Statistics of the Cape Colony.* By
J. X. MERRIMAN, M.L.A.

[Read Feb. 25, 1880.]

THE doctrine, that a careful consideration of the statistics of a country is almost indispensable to good government, is no new one. It was acted upon by most of the nations of antiquity, and the Romans, the foundations of whose empire may be said to have rested on their talent for administration, were especially remarkable for the minute and careful way in which they took due count of the resources of their vast empire. Nor was this census only carried out at stated periods, there is evidence to shew that the daily journals of that age, which answered to our government gazettes, contained very minute particulars concerning the fluctuations of material progress in different parts of the empire, and indeed an old dramatist satirizing the wealthy vulgarian Trimalchio in a well-known passage, gives us a free parody of the exact form in which these daily reports used to appear. In modern times it is needless to point out the importance which is attached to this branch of the science of government, or to enlarge on the almost wearisome minuteness with which most civilized countries and British Colonies think it necessary or desirable to record their resources, to investigate their sanitary condition, and to compare their relative advance or decline in national prosperity from year to year. I fear that it must be added that in this colony we have made but little progress in this direction, although perhaps there

are few of the British possessions where the problems presented in the ordinary course to the government, to say nothing of the complications which arise from our relations with our neighbours, call for a more accurate knowledge of the distribution and extent of the resources at our command. It is for this reason, and because I believe that no attempt, however crude, to group together such scattered figures as we possess, and to draw a deduction from them, is without a certain value, that I venture to ask your consideration to-night to some statistics which bear more immediately upon this question of the value of our colonial resources.

Population.

At the outset we are met with a considerable difficulty in arriving at what may be considered the primary factor in all calculations of this sort, viz. the population of the colony. For not only is there a disturbing element introduced by the population beyond our borders, in Griqualand, the Orange Free State, and elsewhere, who consume our goods and by doing so both add to our revenue and to the burdens of the administration which has to be provided out of it; but the population of the colony itself, consisting as it does of a number of people just emerging from barbarism, can in no sense be considered as homogeneous, or be treated for the purpose of comparison with other colonies as if composed entirely of Europeans.

The gross number of inhabitants in the colony at the time of the last census in March 1875 was 721,000; viz. 237,000 white and 484,000 coloured of different nationalities. The average yearly increase will give at the present time a gross population of 821,000, composed of 267,000 white and 554,000 coloured. These figures do not indeed comprise all the people who come under colonial law and whose good order the colony has to find means to secure, but in estimating the colonial resources they are all who are subject to direct taxation at the hands of the colony. It is evident that this gross population of 821,000 can scarcely be reckoned, for the purpose of comparative statistics, as the true population of the colony, and the great difficulty is to assign a right value to the coloured in proportion to the European element. For the purposes of calculating the relative consumption and production per head of population it will be convenient to fix as in the proportion of two to one, viz. two coloured equal to one European inhabitant, this would give the reduced value of the population at 544,000 equal to that number of effective consumers and producers.

Taking the gross number of inhabitants as given by the census,

the Cape would occupy the following position in comparison with the Australian colonies.

Taking European only.		Taking the reduced effective population given above the order would be
1. Victoria	1. Victoria	1. Victoria
2. Cape	2. New South Wales	2. New South Wales
3. New South Wales	3. New Zealand	3. Cape
4. New Zealand	4. Cape and South Australia almost exactly equal.	4. New Zealand
5. South Australia		5. South Australia

Trade.

Next to the population the consideration of the resources of the country as shewn by the imports and exports is of the most interest. And here to a certain extent we touch solid ground, and have at any rate something more than mere conjecture or estimate on which to base our conclusions. Taking the imports first we find, that during the past three years the colony has imported goods to the value of

	£	Average for 3 years	per head of mean effective population.
1877.	5,158,348	£	
1878.	6,151,023	6,129,800	£11. 10s. 6d.
1879.	7,080,229		

For the last year of the period the result per head was £13. 0s. 6d.

Taking the previous triennial period we find that in the period

	Imports.	Average.
	£	£
1874.	5,558,215	
1875.	5,731,315	5,615,202
1876.	5,556,077	

and, in the middle term of two years which constitutes a transition period between the ante diamond field developement and the present time.

	£	Average for 2 years.
	£	£
1872.	4,388,728	
1873.	5,130,065	4,759,396

In the period of four years preceding the developement of the diamond industry, the figures are:

	£	Average for 4 years.	Value per head of reduced population.
	£	£	
1868.	1,956,154		
1869.	1,953,091		
1870.	2,352,043	2,211,644	£5. 9s. 0d.
1871.	2,585,298		

A comparison between the first and the last of these periods will give a fair measure of the advance of the consuming power of the colony, to trace the reasons for which I shall hereafter endeavour. The last period 1868—71 represents the pre-diamond days, when the colonial consumption was measured by a yearly average of a little more than two million sterling. The second period 1872—73 coincides with the first developement of the mining industry at the "dry diggings." The average consumption at once doubled, and became of the value of four millions sterling in the place of two. The third period, 1874—76 marks the full developement of the great mines at and near Kimberley and also the commencement of our large system of public works. The average consumption during this period advanced more than a million, and finally in the last triennial period the influence of our loans is to be discerned in the further advance of more than half a million sterling in our consumption. One melancholy feature must not however be lost sight of in this apparent advance in importation, and that is the truly enormous value of the bread-stuffs taken for consumption in this colony, during the past three years, which serve to swell very materially the apparent consumption per head.

in 1877 we imported to the value of	£304,438
1878	£543,030
1879	£310,971

or an average £386,146 at the rate of nearly 15s. per head.

When it is remembered that during a similar period 1876, 1877, 1878 the colony of South Australia, with an European population almost exactly equal to our own, exported bread-stuffs in addition to its own requirements to the value of

	£	Average.	or per head of population.
1874-5.	1,680,296	£	
1875-6.	1,988,716	1,618,026	£7. 11s. 0d.
1876-7.	1,184,368		

we see how heavily handicapped we are by this unfortunate demand, and what a vast element of national wealth we are deprived of.

Turning to the exports of the colony during the same period, we are met at the outset with the difficulty, that the colony has apparently made no advance at all. The gross value of exports for 1871 being nearly the same as those for 1879, and the wool export being nearly twenty per cent. less in value than it was in 1867. To a great extent this may of course be accounted

for by the produce of the diamond fields not being included in our returns, and it is singularly unfortunate that it should be possible for a commodity which exercises a disturbing influence upon our commerce to the extent of several millions per annum to elude any attempt to register and estimate its value.

During the past three years the value of exports is given at

	£	Average. £	Average per head of reduced population.
1877.	3,542,694		
1878.	3,312,979	3,506,802	£6. 12s. 0d.
1879.	3,664,735		
and during			
1874.	4,138,838		
1875.	4,088,125	3,875,569	
1876.	3,399,745		
1871.	3,531,609		
1872.	4,757,494	4,332,697	
1873.	3,907,901		
1868.	2,306,698		
1869.	2,225,779	2,367,325	£6. 11s. 6d.
1870.	2,569,499		

It must be remembered that although diamonds are not included in these returns, all articles produced by the colony itself are given, and the returns per head represent perhaps more truly than those for imports the actual trade value of the community. It will be noticed that taking the first and the last period and comparing the returns per head there has been hardly any actual increase in our productive power, and as before alluded to, the production of the principal staple, wool, has actually and relatively declined. The question of the decline in the production of wool is so often disputed and slurred over, that the figures since 1874 which mark a period of steady declension are annexed. Nothing exceeds the importance of this staple as a solid basis of our colonial prosperity, and it is to be hoped that the reaction which seems to have set in during 1879 may again carry this article to its former place in our exports.

1874.

	weight lbs.	value £ stg.
Fleece washed	10,957,928	683,231
Grease	10,233,535	371,573
Scoured	21,629,018	1,893,573
Total	42,820,481	2,948,377

1875.

	weight lbs.	value £ stg.
Fleece washed	11,306,500	702,354
Grease	8,629,809	319,431
Scoured	20,403,365	1,834,114
Total	40,339,674	2,855,899

1876.

	weight lbs.	value £ stg.
Fleece washed	9,476,955	495,796
Grease	5,271,348	183,171
Scoured	20,113,036	1,599,975
Total	34,861,339	2,278,942

1877.

	weight lbs.	value £ stg.
Fleece washed	7,077,771	358,696
Grease	8,876,837	302,000
Scoured	20,065,963	1,572,059
Total	36,020,571	2,232,755

1878.

	weight lbs.	value £ stg.
Fleece washed	7,299,499	361,843
Grease	6,056,284	180,439
Scoured	18,771,384	1,346,646
Total	32,127,167	1,888,928

1879.

	weight lbs.	value £ stg.
Fleece washed	8,045,573	360,625
Grease	9,808,007	280,630
Scoured	22,233,113	1,513,354
Total	40,086,693	2,154,609

Another item of export, viz. ostrich feathers, has grown into great importance during the past five years, and it is often stated that this occupation has interfered with the raising of wool. Very possibly there may be some truth in this, but the following figures will shew that the value of the article, large as it is, by no means compensates for the falling off in the wool exports, and the

fact that the united values of feathers and wool exported for 1879 are less than the value of wool alone for 1874 is deserving the attention of all interested in the progress of the colony.

The value of the export of ostrich feathers is as follows:

	£		£
1874.	205,640	1877.	393,406
1875.	304,933	1878.	591,859
1876.	341,020	1879.	653,756

Before entering on the question of the difference between the colonial exports and imports it may not be uninteresting to compare the values under these heads with those for the several Australian colonies.

During the year 1877, the latest for which complete returns are available, the value of the exports of the following colonies was

	Population.	Value of exports per head.			
		£.	s.	d.	
Victoria	860,787	17	1	3	
N. S. Wales	662,212	19	1	6	
S. Australia	236,864	19	11	0	
New Zealand	417,622	15	3	0	
	Estimated population.				Same during average 3 years.
*Cape Colony	544,000	6	14	6	£6. 12s. 0d.
The Dominion of Canada		4	8	0	
	During 1875.				
British Guiana		12	1	7	
Mauritius		7	8	7	

The value of imports during the same period was

	per head.	
	£.	s. d.
Victoria	19	0 2
New S. Wales	22	0 1
S. Australia	19	11 0
New Zealand	16	14 0
	For 1875.	
Cape	13	0 6
Canada	6	19 1
British Guiana	9	9 10
Mauritius	6	9 4
		average 3 years.
		£11. 0s. 6d.

* It has been objected that it is not fair to assume the estimated value of population at the low number of 544,000, and that the coloured bear a higher ratio of value to Europeans than 2 to 1. But in this case the effect would be to raise the numerical value of divisor and so lower the trade value per head of each unit.

It may be worth notice in connection with the above figures that during the gold mining discoveries in Victoria, which are in some measure analogous to our diamond discoveries, the value of imports in 1853 rose to the enormous figure of £81 per head, and the exports during the same year to £56 per head of the population.

Difference between Exports and Imports.

It will be noticed from the figures that have been given that there is a most serious difference between the value of goods returned as exported from, and those imported into the colony. This difference began at the time of the diamond discoveries, and is in a great measure undoubtedly due to the unrecorded value of the diamonds exported; and it is the fashion to dismiss the subject from consideration with the assurance, that the value of diamonds is the element which is wanting to restore the normal balance, which must exist in a country without either manufacturing resources or accumulated wealth, between the imports of goods for consumption and the exports of rough material from which alone these goods can be paid for. Taking the averages for the periods given above we find that

	Average imports. £	Average export. £	Balance. £
1868-71.	2,211,644	2,658,396	in favour 446,752
1872-73.	4,759,396	4,332,697	against 426,699
1874-76.	5,615,202	3,875,569	„ 1,739,633
1877-79.	6,129,800	3,506,802	„ 2,623,000

Shewing a steady increase in the trade balances against this colony.

In the past three years the figures are:

	Imports. £	Exports. £	Balance. £
1877.	5,158,348	3,542,694	1,615,654
1878.	6,151,023	3,312,979	2,838,044
1879.	7,080,229	3,664,735	3,415,494

To what is this discrepancy owing? It is not probable that the value of the yield in diamonds is greater than it was in 1872—3 when the mine at Kimberley had been discovered and the diggers were raising diamonds without difficulty of a far larger value per carat than that now obtained for the same article. But whatever the yield of diamonds may be, there can be no doubt that the population at the mining centres has diminished, particularly the consuming European population, and the capital invested is in many cases held in England, to which country returns must be transmitted in money or money's value, reducing

proportionately the amount available for the purchase of imported goods. Yet with a probably diminished and certainly not increased purchasing power the value of importations at colonial ports has steadily increased, and is now a million and a half sterling more than it was during the most prosperous times of diamond mining. Clearly therefore the cause of the large figures by which our trade is measured must be sought elsewhere than in the unknown quantity represented by the export value of the yield of diamonds. The population of Griqualand West is estimated on the basis of the census of that territory at 50,000, of whom not more than 15,000 are Europeans, the remainder being for the most part mere labouring savages. This would not give an effective population for purposes of comparison of more than 30,000. Yet we are asked by some recent statistics published at Kimberley to believe that this population absorbs imported goods to the value of two millions and a half, or at a rate per head more than equal to that touched by Victoria in the first rush of the gold discoveries. Looking to all the circumstances of the case and making every allowance for those peculiar to the place, it would not seem possible to allow a consumption of more than one million in value for the population of Griqualand, and we must look elsewhere for an explanation of the large figure by which our import trade is measured.

Setting the diamond fields demand on one side there remain to account for our large purchasing power, as shewn by the absorption of imported goods, the sums derived from foreign capital, borrowed, and expended on our public works and our wars. When it is considered that on the former account upwards of seven millions sterling has been expended, and for war another million, at least, during the last four years, it will be seen at once that the balance of increase in our imports over what we may fairly set down to Diamond Field expenditure, really represents the reflux of capital which we have borrowed for public works, finding its way back to the mother country in exchange for manufactured products, paying toll as it goes in the shape of ten per cent. customs duty. If we compare the period 1874—76, before the effect of our loans had begun to make itself felt, we find that the average balance against the colony was £1,740,000, while for the period 1877—79 the balance was £2,623,000, shewing an average increase of nearly a million sterling a year, which may fairly be held to be an excess over the demand springing from the export of diamonds—and to be attributed to the return of borrowed capital. This is not the place to enlarge on the economic effect of such a sudden inflation, but it is a fact which deserves to be carefully noted and studied by all whose duty leads them to form a true estimate of colonial prosperity.

There remains in conclusion one other cause which accounts for our increased imports, and that is the growing demand among the natives for European manufactures. To a great extent this demand springs from the other two causes above alluded to, viz. the diamond discoveries and the expenditure on public works. It has been estimated by a competent judge, (Mr North) that it costs one half the gross value of the output of diamonds to produce them, and fully one half this cost goes in wages to natives. When we recollect that the yield is generally taken at two millions sterling, we see what an enormous purchasing power is given to the coloured population from this source. The same thing has also taken place on our public works, where at one time nearly ten thousand labourers were employed. It is much to be regretted that there are no figures to shew even approximately the existing demand for manufactured products in such communities as Basutoland and the Transkei. For the former place it has been stated that the importations are at least £300,000 sterling, and for the Transkei I have had several estimates given by trustworthy persons who concur in placing the total demand at over £200,000.

If these figures are correct, and there is no reason to believe them overstrained, we should have an effective demand in these two territories alone of some half million a year, a demand which has certainly sprung up within the last decade, and which promises to be a growing one. This subject is deserving of more ventilation and enquiry, and I feel sure, that if the dry light of statistics was turned on our coloured fellow subjects, we should find that we had in the easily awakened wants of our native population a mine of wealth which only requires to be turned to good account to convince even those who are most disgusted with the extremely troublesome subject known as the native question, that the black man may be worked to pay in this country and to pay handsomely.