from the press for and against that mischievous policy; and the offence of *running wool* prevailed to a great extent. These pamphlets are noticed in Smith’s Memoirs of Wool, and the absurdity of the prohibition is exposed in a manner which certainly anticipated the general current of the po­litical and economical knowledge of that age.

The prevalence of this disposition to export wool in spite of severe laws, affords a proof that our production of wool was in advance of our means of working it up. We were in fact an agricultural nation, and it was not until our spin­ning machinery was improved, and our skill became rapidly developed, that the tide may be said to have turned.

Towards the end of the last century, as will be seen by the table we shall presently exhibit, England began to be an importer of wool. Laws prohibiting the “ running of wool” then became a dead letter ; and before 1800, we were annual importers to the extent of 4,000,000 lbs., our whole demand being about 100,000,000 lbs. At this period, how­ever, the landowners began to take the alarm, and a duty, a mischievous duty, of 5s. 3d. per cwt. was imposed on all foreign wool imported into Great Britain. In 1813 the duty was raised to 6s. 8d. per cwt.; and in 1819 Mr Van­sittart (Lord Bexley), perhaps the most ignorant and vul­gar-minded minister that ever managed, or rather mis­managed, the financial affairs of this realm, raised the duty to 56s. per cwt., or 6d. per lb. The effect of this was simply to deteriorate the quality of British manufacture. To produce the finer cloths, foreign wools were absolutely necessary. When Mr Vansittart imposed this duty, the soft Spanish wools were much used in the clothing dis­tricts, and the Saxony wools were coming into use. (See the next table.) The English wools were utterly unfit for the production of our finest cloths ; and our exports, in con­sequence of the virtual prohibition of foreign wools, showed symptoms of decline. In 1824 the duty was reduced to 3d., and at the end of the same year to Id. In July 1825 the duty was further reduced to 1/2d. on wools under 1s. in price, being continued at 1d. on wools at and over 1s., at which rates the duties have since remained. This reduc­tion has produced the most beneficial effects, not merely on manufactures, but also on the steady price of English wools, which have been much higher on the average since the re­duction than they were before, although we have become importers to the extent of half the whole quantity we con­sumed when Mr Vansittart’s tax was imposed. The re­duction of this impolitic duty has in fact been one of the causes by which our manufactures have so rapidly increased since 1826.

Having said thus much of the quantity of English wool consumed in the manufactures, we now come to the history of our foreign importations.

We have already stated, that before the end of the last century, our production, in point of quantity, was greater than the amount of our wants. Importation up to 1803 having been free, some small quantity of foreign wool found its way into this country ; but it was only an ex­change of one quality for another, and our real demand previous to 1800 was exceedingly small. Our whole impor­tation, in fact, only averaged 4,000,000 lbs., the greater part of which consisted of the fine soft clothing wool of Spain.

The year 1800 exhibited an increase to nearly 9,000,000 lbs., of which 6,000,000 was still received from Spain, and nearly 1,500,000 from Portugal. This went on until the peace, when an increased quantity of Saxon wool came in­to the English markets. The Merino breed of sheep had been introduced into Saxony by the elector, afterwards king of that state, and with most signal success. During the war, our imports from Germany had never reached 1,000,000; in 1815 they exceeded 3,000,000, and the quantity has since increased, so as to exceed 25,000,000 lbs. on the average of years, while the quantity of Spanish wool has progressively declined. These changes, and the general progress of our importations of foreign wool, will be best exhibited by the following table, giving the importa­tions in periods of five years from 1796 to 1835.

*Table showing the principal Sources of Supply of Foreign Wool from* 1796 to 1835.

The great change that is now going on, however, consists in the rapid increase in the supply of wool from Australia; a change which the above table exhibits to a certain ex­tent, but which the more detailed comparison we arc about to offer will place in a more conspicuous light.

The first person who became impressed with the pecu­liar fitness of New South Wales for the growth of wool was Captain John Macarthur, one of the most intelligent and energetic of the early settlers in that colony. He there commenced farming operations in 1793, but his only sheep at that time were Bengal ewes, whose wool is extreme­ly coarse. About two years after, he procured a Merino ram from the Cape, with two ewes of the same breed, and with these he began crossing, and selecting the finest- woolled rams to breed with, so as continually to improve the wool on the principle pointed out in the early part of this article.

In 1802, he brought specimens of his wool to England, which being approved by some experienced cloth manu­facturers, he obtained a hearing before the privy council. He obtained an additional grant of land in a very fer­tile part of the colony, and with three fine-woolled Merino rams and two ewes he returned to the colony to prosecute his favourite plan. It is scarcely necessary to state, that the most extraordinary success has attended the breeding of sheep; and the wool is said to be equal, when perfectly clean, to the Merino wools of Saxony, and would sell for as high a price, but for the little care taken in washing pre­viously to shearing. In fineness, softness, length, and sound­ness of staple, and in colour, the Australian wools equal those of Germany ; but they are in a bad state as to clean­ness, though we believe that in this respect more care is evinced than formerly. If washed after shearing, they would arrive in sounder condition, and would command a higher price ; but whether they would yield a larger profit, depends on the additional labour which, in the case supposed, it would be necessary to bestow. This is a point sometimes overlooked. Persons unaccustom­ed to reason upon facts connected with production are apt to think it must be better worth the producer’s while to bring to market a good article, and so command a high price, than an inferior and therefore a low-priced article. But if to raise the value of his wool, say from 2s. to 2s. 6d., the New South Wales flock-master found it necessary to expend additional labour to the value of sevenpence, it is clear the advantage is on the side of the inferior wool.

In 1810 the importation of wool from Australia was only 167 lb., worth not above L.15. In 1820, the quantity had nearly reached 100,000 lbs. ; and this year it will most likely exceed 12,000,000 lbs., being equal to our whole importa­tion from every country in the world in 1810. The fol-

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Year.** | **Spain.** | **Germany.** | **New South Wales.** | **Other**  **Countries.** | **Total.** |
| **1796**  **1799** | **3,300,000** | **300,000** | **...** | **400,000** | **4,000,000** |
| **1800** | **6,062,834** | **412,394** | **...** | **2,140,066** | **8,615,284** |
| **1805** | **6,858,738** | **36,787** | **...** | **1,645,751** | **8,541,276** |
| **1810** | **5,902,407** | **778,835** | **167** | **4,264,315** | **10,936,224**  **14,991,713**  **10,073,746** |
| **1815** | **6,927,570** | **3,137.438** | **...** | **4,926,696** |
| **1820** | **3,536,227** | **5,113,242** | **99,415** | **1,324,860** |
| **1825** | **8,206,472** | **28,709,660** | **323,995** | **5,507,734** | **42,837,861** |
| **1830** | **1,643,513** | **26,073,882** | **1,967,309** | **2,628,355** | **32,313,059** |
| **1835** | **1,602,782** | **23,798,186** | **4,210,310** | **12,563,276** | **42,174,523** |