

Another very important point to the shipper is, that a ton weight of well-dressed fibre will occupy much less space than the material hitherto shipped; so that, when properly prepared, the item of freight will, from that source alone, be reduced fully one-fifth, while in many other respects the preparation of a really good, well-conditioned article will obviously benefit all concerned. It will only be by sending the very best that we can expect to compete with the vegetable fibres of other countries and create a lasting demand, thereby rendering permanent a truly profitable industry, which, I think I shall hereafter be able to show, proffers to do more for the future welfare of the country than even the best gold field in the world. Nevertheless a good gold field would speedily populate the place and give a wonderful present impetus to every link in the chain of human usefulness, even to the flax industry.

But I have not yet exhausted the fault-finding portion of my communication, for I am sorry to have already observed some deception in packing; I am, however, pleased to think that such charge cannot be laid upon the proprietors of works beyond a want of vigilance, neither do I think there has been any desire on the part of employers to cheat buyers, but I believe the error has originated from inexperienced workmen being desirous to place the best possible face on their work. However, the result must be equally prejudicial wherever the blame may rest, for being a new article in the market, the character of the whole supply will suffer, and I feel that it is impossible to sufficiently impress upon our flax producers the necessity for getting up their article in the best possible manner, and to adopt brands and adhere to them, so that both colonial and home buyers may know what they are about.

Coming again to the cleansing processes, I need not say much about the machinery, even in this Province; we have several makers, each having their supporters, and who are all gradually improving their mechanism. Nevertheless, the result of the work depends nearly as much upon the management as the machinery, for some hands, although generally diligent and careful, do not possess the necessary experience of machinery, or even mechanical tendencies, and when doing their best frequently injure the fibre and damage machinery.

I pointed out before that there was a wide difference between the fibre as got up in Auckland and that prepared here. I now emphatically repeat that assertion, which I doubt not will be amply borne out by the relative returns for fibre sent from there, and much of that shipped from here. In fact, it has to a certain extent already been verified by Messrs. Henderson and Macfarlane's first consignments, which (although not equal to the material now produced in the North) realized from £32 10s. to £35 per ton; while, on the other hand, it will be a most encouraging feature in favour of the New Zealand fibres, if much of that hitherto shipped from here finds a market at all in Britain.

I also now repeat that it is principally in the treatment or manipulation of the fibre throughout the constant handling, from passing the stripper up to packing, where the fault lies, and that sufficient care was not generally exercised in the fixing and working of the mechanical appliances, which, although of light construction, are necessarily driven at great speed, and yet have to endure a considerable irregularity of strain, consequently they need to be firmly fixed, and so arranged as to the utmost to prevent vibration. Therefore the more detached and firmly the strippers are fixed, and the more substantial the driving shaft, &c., the better, as, when several machines are fixed on one frame, and are driven by one shaft, they will frequently take up the beat of each other, causing largely increased shaking throughout, especially if the driving shaft is not very strong and firmly supported between each pulley; and as constant checks are experienced by each stripper, the vibration of all on the same stand is bound to be affected, and their working rendered more or less imperfect. Firmness in the construction of flax works is of much more importance than neatness without solidity.

It may also be well to suggest to inexperienced investors that, with the class of machinery now in use, the irregular strain upon them, &c., while driven at such velocity, it would still repay the proprietors of any large concern to employ an expert mechanist as overseer of the stripping department, to keep a vigilant eye upon the machinery, providing also suitable appliances on the spot, to enable such person to effect slight repairs, and thereby often prevent imperfect dressing and save costly damages.

That superior appliances, or even new methods of cleansing the fibre, will eventuate from the rapidly increasing trade, must be both hoped for and expected; but to wait for such would be suicidal, since to defer operations would be once more allowing the industry to slumber, or perhaps to altogether die away, and as, with the present means, returns can be made which ought to satisfy the even greedy minds, there is no need to do so. None of the strippers now in use throughout the Colony may be perfect, but still the system more closely resembles the old Maori system of scraping than anything else.

The practice of dressing out of doors is not calculated to yield favourable results as to condition or profit, for much time must frequently be lost; and according to the present process, it is desirable to strip the leaf when fresh cut, therefore the machinery should, if practicable, be run until the supply on hand is worked up; and taking all things into account, suitable erections are necessary to secure proper and profitable results. It will pay better to cart the green leaf a few miles on fair roads than to carry on the business without proper protection against changeable weather.

Returning to the manipulation. After coming from the mills I explained that the system of bleaching, as practised here, was very faulty. I now reiterate that opinion; a uniform colour cannot be secured, neither can half the fibre be properly cleansed in the process of scutching. Even the washing is faulty, being rinsed in too large quantities; while all throughout the various manipulations the fibre is not kept in regular lengths, being, in fact, made to nearly resemble tow, and in many instances not much better, so that on reaching the manufacturers they cannot do anything without first subjecting it to some combing process, and even then can never satisfactorily sort it. Now in the North the fibre is carefully kept in small hanks, of about three or four leaves, throughout each operation, the butt-ends of each of such parcels being kept evenly together, and finally packed in that manner, so that buyers in the home market can easily examine the quality; and it can be readily assorted according to its capabilities or the requirements of the manufacturer, and it may even have to be cut into two or more lengths, and such lengths of each hank be converted to different purposes, for, like the leaf, the fibre tapers from root to tip, the bottom being coarse and gradually fining upwards. If then the material is forwarded home in the state in which most of the shipments from Canterbury have gone, such classification becomes impossible, its adaptability for various purposes of