

THE following information has been received since the printing of that part of the Report in which it should appear.

30th September, 1871.

J. HECTOR.

HON. COMMISSIONER OF CUSTOMS.

The reports that were brought a few months ago by almost every mail of the large quantities of New Zealand flax that were landed in England in a damaged condition, and the heavy loss sustained by the Colony from this cause, led me to think that it would be very desirable if this matter could be looked into by some trustworthy person on the spot.

As Mr Chilman, the Collector of Customs at New Plymouth, about the time I refer to was on the point of leaving for England, on leave of absence, I wrote to him and asked him to endeavour to be present when any of the New Zealand laden vessels might be discharged in London, and afterwards, if possible, to trace the flax through the various warehouses and brokers' hands until it reached the manufacturer. Mr. Chilman readily assented to my request. By the last mail I received a letter from him, of which a copy is annexed, containing some interesting and valuable information on this subject, which I suggest should be communicated to the Flax Commissioners, with a view to being made public in such manner as they may consider best.

30th September, 1871.

W. SEED.

RICHARD CHILMAN, Esq., to W. SEED, Esq., Secretary of Customs.—London, 27th July, 1871.

I have investigated the question of sea-damaged flax, and had a good opportunity of doing so, inasmuch as some shipped in the "Melita" by the Company I am interested in, was classed as sea damaged. I went to the warehouse and saw the wharfinger to whom it appears the classification rests, and he pointed out to me the bales so classed. It appears that if a bale were discoloured, say a foot square, or even less, it is put down as sea damaged. I had a bale opened, and drew the wharfinger's attention to the fact that even in the slight portion that was stained the strength of the fibre was not injured. He admitted this, but said that change of colour was a proof of damage more or less; so that if a single hank is discoloured, or even a few strands in a single hank, as I pointed out in one instance, a bale of 3 cwt. is to be branded. The wharfinger said that if the damage was only slight, the purchaser would take this into account; but I am satisfied this is not so, at all events I shall attend the public sale on Wednesday next, and shall then be better able to judge; but I am afraid it is a case of giving a dog a bad name, and that the produce suffers by this arbitrary action. There is no doubt that the damage, more or less, occurs on board the ship from sea water.

Another most important point in packing the bales of an uniform size, and the wharfinger recommends the following dimensions—that of an ordinary bale of jute, 3.2 x 2.2 x 1.6; this package should weigh from 300 to 350 lbs. One difficulty that might occur was pointed out to me. The supply of jute in London just now is very limited, but if there were large arrivals of jute and of flax, the flax would be rejected; because from being so loosely packed, and the bales of different sizes, it would be more profitable for the warehouseman to take in the jute. This question of packing so materially affects the cost of freight that mill owners cannot be too particular about it. Another point is that the flax should be done up into hanks—we have packed some full length, but it is a mistake. The twist in the hank in no way injures the fibre. The largest rope-maker in Liverpool called his working foreman into his office when I was there and asked him about it. Covering with Hessian, as we have done, is also an useless expense; it does not prevent the sea water from getting to the flax, and from its being so open I am not sure but what it spreads the stain over a larger surface. I hope this information may be of service. I shall see any parties in London interested in flax, and get them to co-operate with me in a strong representation to the brokers respecting the sea damaged flax, as there is no doubt that it would be better to take out all hanks that are discoloured, than to let this bugbear affect the price of the whole bale.

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Extract from Messrs. M'LANDESSS, HEPBURN, and Co.'s monthly Flax Circular, dated London, July 27th, 1871.

We have had a quiet but very firm market for New Zealand flax during the past month, and prices, particularly of the better qualities, have ruled in favor of sellers. The import since the 29th ult. has been 1,200 bales, but the "Queen Bee," bringing over 700 bales, which are said to consist of superior quality, has not yet discharged; consequently the supplies on the market have only been moderate. The transactions reported by private contract total up about 1,300 bales, and 1,253 bales have been offered at auction, of which 670 bales found buyers, the following prices being those obtained at the most recent sales, viz.:—For barely three-fourths cleaned, £17 10s; for three-fourths cleaned, of inferior to good quality, £18 to £25 10s; fairly dressed of middling to good color and quality, £24 to £20 5s; and well-dressed flax £30 10s to £34 5s per ton. Of 56 bales tow, only 25 bales of coarse common quality sold at £11 per ton. There is no doubt that this fibre is now looked upon with greater favour by rope makers, and so long as a wide margin exists between its value and that of Manila hemp, its consumption will steadily increase; the latter fibre has been in improved demand this month, and prices have advanced £1 per ton, £46 to £46 10s being the present value of fair roping. Some improved specimens of New Zealand flax have recently come to hand, and we trust that the exertions being made in the colony to discover a method of preparing the fibre before shipment that will soften and divide it sufficiently fine to make it suitable for the manufacture of textile fabrics, will ultimately be crowned with complete success.