

ESTIMATE by Messrs. T. and C. NICHOLS of the cost of producing two tons fibre (*Phormium tenax*) by their new process.

							£	s.	d.
Ten tons of leaves @ 20s.	...	...	...	...	...	...	10	0	0
Fuel ...	...	...	...	...	...	...	3	15	0
Labor—									
Six men @ 5s.	...	...	...	...	...	...	1	10	0
Ten boys @ 3s.	...	...	...	...	...	...	1	10	0
One Engineer	...	...	...	...	...	...	1	0	0
One Fireman	...	...	...	...	...	...	0	10	0
Superintendent	...	...	...	...	...	...	1	7	6
Packing ...	...	...	...	...	...	...	0	7	6
							£20	0	0

For two tons, or £10 per ton.

Freight and transport, inclusive of insurance and charges to London, £7 10s. to £10 per ton. Total cost per ton in London from £17 10s. to £20 per ton—the transport charges being regulated by circumstances.

As a proof of the confidence which exists in the permanence of the trade and in its profitable character, I may mention that in the course of a few weeks only Messrs. T. and C. Nichols have succeeded in floating their company (under the style of “The Colonial and Foreign Fibre Company, Limited”), with a capital of £100,000, the first issue of which, namely, £50,000, is already subscribed.

In order to show the scope of the company’s intended operations, I may be allowed to quote the following extracts from the prospectus just issued by the directors:—

“This company is formed for the purpose of extracting and importing, in a perfectly cleansed condition the fibre of the *Phormium tenax* (or New Zealand flax), the *Musa paradisiaca* (or plantain), the aloe, and other fibre-bearing plants which are found to be growing in various parts of the world, but more particularly indigenous to New Zealand, the East and West Indies, and the Cape Colonies. This fibre forms a most important article of commerce, for which there is an increasing demand. Hitherto no really efficient process has been introduced adapted for effectually and cheaply disintegrating the fresh leaves and stems; and, consequently, millions of tons of plants, from which fibre is obtainable, continue to be wasted for want of suitable means of extracting the fibre while the plants and leaves are in a green state, and the gummy matter or *Parenchyma* is soluble and removable, and before it has had time to harden and become to the manufacturer the obstacle and source of trouble and expense it has hitherto been.

“The company is prepared to achieve this desirable end by the adoption of new, efficient, and powerful machinery simple in principle, inexpensive in construction, requiring but little, and that inexpensive, manual labour, being specially designed for use in the Colonies and countries where the price of labour is high; and which has been invented and perfected after many years of experience and patient research. The machinery has been subjected to severe tests; repeated and careful experiments upon the leaves of the *Phormium tenax* and aloe, and stems of the plantain (specially imported for the purpose), have resulted in an entire success, producing by a single operation, and at a very small cost, most beautifully cleansed and white specimens of fibre, possessing all the characteristics required by the manufacturer as to strength, length of fibre, fineness, and whiteness, infinitely superior to any of the fibres hitherto introduced, which, owing to their imperfect cleansing, are unsuitable for many manufacturers without further costly preparation.

“The marked and highly important contrast between the method now pursued of preparing fibre and that proposed to be adopted by the company is this, that whereas the fibre, as at present imported, is extracted by several tedious, complicated, and expensive processes, involving waste of material, time, and money, and, after all, producing but an indifferent article, the company’s machinery will extract the pure fibre by one process, rapidly, economically, and in a perfectly clean state, uniform in quality, freed from all uncertainty as to result, with little or no waste, and entirely avoiding the injurious use of chemicals, steeping, retting, or other objectionable means, which all tend to damage the quality and character of the fibre.

“The demand for fibrous materials other than silk, wool, or cotton, has increased to a remarkable degree, and still continues to do so, while the supply does not keep pace with it. The importation in large quantities of the company’s perfectly clean fibres will, therefore, prove a great boon to the manufacturer, by affording him a continuous supply of an article thoroughly suited to his requirements, and thereby stimulate a steady demand for the product, add to its value, and give an immense impetus to trade.

“The *Phormium tenax* flourishes uncultivated over immense districts in New Zealand, and from the Report of the New Zealand Flax Commission and other sources it appears that an unlimited supply of leaves may always be relied on at an average of 20s. per ton, yielding in many cases as much as 25 per cent. of clean fibre to the ton of fresh gathered leaves. The successful development of the flax will be of paramount importance to the Colony, and its interests will be greatly advanced by the introduction of the company’s works.”

How far this new process above described may prove a success when applied on a large scale and to the production of fibre in bulk remains to be seen; and some months must necessarily elapse before the completion of the machinery required for the proposed operations.

But the promoters of the scheme are very sanguine, and have promised (should I still be in England) to communicate with me as soon as the full-sized experimental machine is in working order, so that I may have an opportunity of seeing it in action.