

MR. M. MURPHY, F.L.S., secretary of the Canterbury Agricultural and Pastoral Association, Christchurch, writes, under date 22nd August, enclosing a paper on the ramee, or China grass, a fibrous plant which could be successfully and profitably grown in the northern portion of New Zealand.

NOTES by MR. J. C. CHAYTOR.

*Machinery.*—During my late visit to England, I went to Manchester especially to see the Lank-sheer machine, for dressing ramee, as it had been suggested that it might answer for flax-dressing purposes. I did not see it at work, but I do not think it could be adapted to our needs. I also saw machines for dressing aloe leaves. They are on the same principle as Price's flax-machines, but very different in size and details. From the shape of the flax-leaf, with its thick butt and thin edges and point, I have great doubt about any machine being invented to dress it perfectly. I think that some modification of the machines we have now, combined with retting, and perhaps some improvement in the scutching, will be found near perfection for the production of hemp for rope- and twine-making, for which alone our hemp seems to be used. I was told the fibre we send is not suitable for spinning. We have it on record that fine fabrics have been made of New Zealand flax. Some years ago I saw various articles of clothing that were said to be made of it. It is to be hoped that some method of turning it to profitable account as a weaving material may be discovered.

*Sea-damage.*—Sea-damage is a cause of some anxiety to flax-millers, as it has not been covered by insurance. Generally I have not found the loss heavy, but just before I left New Zealand last October I had advice of a shipment of fifty-two bales of hemp ex "Tainui" being badly sea-damaged. Only thirteen bales were landed sound. Some sold for £2 1s. and £1 15s. per bale, which would barely cover freight and expenses. I made particular inquiries about this in London, and was told that a port had been burst in, and we had no claim against the ship. The shipping company has only to get a certificate from the dock company that the hemp has been properly stowed, or that it is sea-damaged, to hold it harmless for loss by chafing or sea-damage. From what I could learn I believe some damage is caused by "sweat," which might be avoided by having proper ventilation. The carrying trade of New Zealand is too much of a monopoly at present, and bills of lading are prepared to guard shipowners against nearly every possible risk. We might reasonably expect the shipowners to keep our goods dry while in their charge or pay the damage. We must look to combination amongst the shippers to bring about some improvement in this respect, together with general reduction of freights and charges. Underwriters in London would insure against sea-damage, but they would first have to study the subject, to see what the risk was worth. They would stipulate for the right to sort damaged bales and sell the sound portions separately. This might be worth doing now on account of the shippers.

*Condition.*—The hemp I saw in warehouses seemed to have been landed clean and in good order.

*Dumping.*—Before I left New Zealand reports were current that hemp was being damaged by dumping. I made inquiries and saw for myself that the hemp that was well cleaned and dry when packed came out in perfect condition. Some I saw caked together, but it seemed to have been gummy and damp when packed. Some inconvenience and delay in giving delivery had been caused by dumping bales of two different brands together. I was told that this should be particularly avoided.

*Sampling.*—Some bales from each shipment are taken to the show-rooms, where they are laid out in rows and the ties cut. The buyers take out hanks as they please, open them and see how the flax is dressed; and no slovenly work or dishonest packing is likely to escape them. I saw Mauritius hemp packed in wrappers. It was not thought that it would be any advantage to us to cover our hemp.

*Sales.*—The sales are held every Wednesday afternoon. The business, both selling and buying, is chiefly done by the brokers, and I understand manufacturers seldom, if ever, attend. The discount of 3¼ per cent. will only be got rid of by steady combination on the part of the producers. Buyers are said to take the discount into account in making their bids. It would be better to simplify the matter, and sell on cash terms like wool. Till lately sheepskins were subject to 2½ per cent. discount, they are now sold on the same terms as wool.

*Bales.*—Small bales about 3¼cwt. and small hanks are preferred by manufacturers. Bales are better tied with hemp or rope than wire. Labels of calico, with brand, &c., marked on them and sewn to two ties, answer well. The hemp should be as like manila as possible—i.e., free from straw and of a uniform pale yellow. Our hemp now seems to have got a firm hold on the market, and I was told by a large consumer that for a first-class sample there would be a constant demand. The whole of our production is a mere trifle in the fibre markets of the world, as may be seen by the receipts of manila alone in the London market, which were: For 1888, 658,000 bales, and for 1889, 566,000. The prices of the various fibres per hundredweight we have to compete with were quoted on 18th January, 1890, as follows: Russian hemp, from 19s. 6d. to £1 11s. 6d.; manila hemp, from £2 9s. to £2 17s.; sisal hemp, from £2 3s. to £2 4s.; Mauritius hemp, from £1 8s. to £1 18s.; New Zealand hemp, from £1 4s. to £1 14s.; Bombay hemp, from 8s. 6d. to £1 0s. 6d.; Sunn hemp, from 12s. to £1; Italian hemp, from £1 12s. to £2 16s.; jute, 18s. to £1 2s. 6d. We may expect the present depression will be only temporary. Prices must depend on fluctuations in supply and demand of the fibre markets of the world, which are beyond our control; but it will depend very much on the flax-millers themselves to make our hemp take a high place in the list of fibres, and keep up the demand, by shipping only hemp of thoroughly good quality. With this object in view, I think it would be very desirable to form an association of all flax-millers, who should contribute a small sum per ton on the hemp they produce to cover expenses; that a committee should collect and circulate amongst members any information likely to be useful; buy any patent rights for the use of members that might be found desirable; establish standards of hemp if practicable