

The witness here made a statement to the effect that off a small piece of land, about 3 acres, on the Ashley, he got in one year over 50 tons of flax per acre, and two years after a crop nearly as large.

157. *The Chairman.*] We understand from you that, as far as you are concerned, you do not approve of the chemical process of preparing fibre?—No.

158. You have never tried it?—I have not tried it personally, but I have heard that it cripples the fibre.

159. Could it not be used in such a way that it would not cripple the fibre?—I do not understand chemicals myself; but it is not required at all for the purposes for which flax is at present used. The defects are not the fault of the machine nor of the flax, but of the people who work it.

160. You said you stacked the fibre?—We stack it outside for a time.

161. Why do you stack it?—We find it ripens a little. It scutches far better for being in stacks for a time.

162. You cover the stacks?—No. If they are stacked properly they would not get wet.

163. You stated also to the Committee, in answer to a question, that it required 6 tons of green leaf for a ton of fibre?—Six tons is the nominal requirement to make a ton of fibre at the present time. It depends on the weather, and on the time of year.

164. Does it depend so much on the weather or more on the green leaf you use?—It does not depend so much on that as on the weather.

165. Is there not more waste in dressing the young leaves you spoke of which could be cut at four months than from one twelve months old?—In the green leaf? No; not at all. If you get a leaf more than twelve months old it begins to rot away.

166. It is firmer, and you will find there is more stuff about it?—When a leaf begins to get dry it is so far gone that it is no use for fibre whatever. It is only the green leaf which is used for making good fibre. We cannot work up dry leaves; they are no use, while they cost as much as a good leaf.

167. As to the piece of land you spoke of, you say you got 50 tons out of it the first year of cutting and two years afterwards you cut nearly as much; have you any idea of the yield of fibre then?—I got in the second crop nearly as much as I did in the first.

168. Did you get the same result as in the first year?—Not quite so much.

169. *Mr. Marchant.*] What particular variety of flax was this, do you know?—I could not say. It was a mixed lot.

170. *The Chairman.*] Do you strip the top and the edge of the flax when you are putting it through the machine?—We put the leaves through as they are.

171. Does not the machine leave the front edge on a little?—Not if the machine is kept in fair order. The machine will dress it equal to that [pointing to the specimen of flax on the table], if you require it, without any trouble.

172. So far as you are concerned, if any bonus should be offered it should be for machinery?—Yes; it should be offered for machinery. It might result in improving flax for some other valuable uses more than at the present time. No doubt there will be a machine invented at some time to turn out fibre for textile purposes.

173. *Mr. Wilson.*] In reference to the question of machinery, the cost of turning it out seems to me excessive. The thing would be to devise a means of reducing this cost by £3, £4, or £5. Is it not possible that some process might be found which would give us the same result with hemp at a much less cost?—Yes. If you could bring out a machine that you could put it into and bring it out finished.

174. *The Chairman.*] If the green leaf has been delivered at the mill, what do you consider it would cost to turn it into fibre ready to be taken away to the railway-station?—I cannot answer that question definitely. It wants some consideration. It would cost perhaps £7.

175. You think it would cost £7 to manufacture from green leaf, delivered at the mill, a ton of hemp?—I do not think it could be done under £7.

176. That is a tremendous price?—I am speaking of my own market quality.

I wish to add to the above that I have since visited the Manawatu district and examined several mills, and see no reason to alter any of the evidence I have given as to the reasons for the difference in the value of the dressed fibre in the London market; and on all sides I have been impressed with the fact that had those in charge of the mills more experience the fibre would be as good as that dressed in the South Island referred to all through my evidence. The flax-leaf is generally very good, and no bonus is required for the present system of dressing.—C. CHINNERY. 1st August, 1890.

JOHN HOLMES, of the Firm of Holmes and Bell, Merchants, of Blenheim and London,
examined.

177. *The Chairman.*] The Committee has been appointed, Mr Holmes, to inquire into the flax industry, and to make recommendations to the Government. We understand you are able to give us some information on the question. Will you make a statement of what you know about the matter?—Well, to begin with, I did not know that I should be called upon at so short notice to give any information, because I did not come to Wellington for the specific purpose; consequently I have no data or figures to refer to. But I understand the object of the Government is (1) to place a sufficient sum upon the estimates to induce greater interest in the development of the industry by reason of improved machinery; and on that point I would say that I am certainly impressed with the idea that if there were sufficient funds and a good bonus it would no doubt attract a large number of competitors, and the country would gain the benefit of the brains of engineers and other men, flax-dressers (practical and otherwise), in developing some new machinery, for it must be patent, I think, to everybody interested in the flax industry that some improvement