

rope, cordage, and binder-twine purposes, and that the statements which have been made frequently with regard to the use of New Zealand hemp for other purposes are quite mistaken ones. Of course it may be used in very small quantities. It has been suggested that it should be used for making baskets for labouring men in which to carry their food and things of that kind: in France, for instance, and other places. But then the consumption would be very small. The great bulk of the consumption would be for twine, rope, and cordage, and we must consequently look to its production in that way, and for producing it in large quantities at a time.

182. *Mr. Wilson.*] You have seen the fabrics here that have been made of the flax in New Zealand?—No, I have not myself inspected them.

183. You do not know if it would imagine was quite good enough for any purpose almost?—It might be possible. At present, however, the great consumption is for rope.

184. *The Chairman.*] Have you anything further to say?—I do not know that I have anything else to say.

185. *Mr. Mackenzie.*] Have you ever grown flax for cutting?—No.

186. You do not know if it would pay to grow it for that purpose?—No, I could not tell.

187. Do you think that the present prices you are getting in London for flax are good enough?—Certainly not. There is at present an absolute loss upon it.

188. What are you getting in London?—My last cable advice quoted £18 and £19 per ton, at which we have not sold.

189. Do you think that if the fibre was better dressed that it would last as long as manila, or ever take its place?—I do not think that I can answer such a question for the reason that it really requires an expert to give an opinion on the point. The reason why I suggested better cleaning of the article, and that a better fibre should be produced, is that it would insure for it a ready sale to begin with; and also—the examination might come under this heading—insure that the producer would take more care in the production of it, because he would know that if he did not send a good article it would not be saleable. The people are finding that out at the present time. In my opinion, a great deal of the fault arises from the fact that there has been no official inspection. The producer has been allowed to send what he likes, and when it gets to London it has the effect of being rejected on all sides with the objections, as I have said—received at the last moment, that it is not f.a.q., that it is not fine medium, and so on.

190. *Mr. Mackenzie.*] The reason I ask it is this: I understood from a former witness to-day that if the dressing of the flax were improved it would increase the cost, and that even the improved dressing would not be the only increase in cost, but that more gum would be taken out, and that there would be a loss in the waste. If that were so, it would raise the value of the fibre above what the present buyers at Home can afford to give for the purposes for which it is used?—I do not agree with you there, for the reason that they have already given £42 per ton for New Zealand flax, and, with all due respect to my friend Mr. Mackenzie, it is not right to say that there would be a difficulty in getting the price. They can afford to give it.

191. *Major Steward.*] Now?—Yes; they have given £42 10s. for New Zealand flax. We have sold at £38 in London, and it is absurd to say that the price could be reduced to the level of £16, which is less than half.

192. *Mr. Mackenzie.*] I do not think you see the point quite in what I am asking you. Of course, the supply of other fibres would regulate the prices you would receive for New Zealand flax?—Not altogether, Mr. Mackenzie, for the reason that New Zealand flax will, in my opinion, come into permanent use as a fibre itself in the same way as manila has come into use, and sisal also. It was stated on good authority the other day that some of the best rope-makers in London—Mr. Levin is the authority—were using manila and sisal for a special class of their production, and that they substituted New Zealand hemp to a considerable extent, and that they were glad to report that New Zealand hemp suited all their requirements—in fact, made a better article.

193. That is the point. What I want to bring out is this: You say they used sisal for the same purpose as New Zealand flax is used for?—I say it has been stated so.

194. If that is so, and if sisal can be produced and landed in London at a lower rate than New Zealand flax, it follows, if the sisal could be sold as such, merchants would not pay more for New Zealand flax, and unless the improved dressed flax will take the place of the higher priced article, such as manila, it seems to me the process will be thrown away, unless we can find a market for the superior-dressed article?—I do not agree with you there. If it were possible, by offering a bonus of £10,000, to get invented to-morrow a machine which would reduce the cost of producing by £2 per ton it would be well worth the Government's while to do it.

195. It would reduce the cost of producing, but one of the main features, I understand, was that it should improve the value of the fibre?—That is only the opinion of one witness who spoke on the point. He said possibly it might have the effect of reducing the cost. I do not think we should confine its conditions merely to improving the fibre, because, as I have replied already, you can improve the fibre—you can throw away £1 5s. and take up a £1. That is not economy; that is not what we want. We want to offer a bonus which would produce a result of this kind: Suppose the present machines turn out from 2½ to 3 tons of fibre a week, we should have another machine which would produce the same quantity at £3 or £4 less cost per ton. I am not prepared to say it can be done, but by the united brains of the community, if there were sufficient inducement offered to them, something could be done.

195A. What does it cost to lay the raw material at a mill before you begin to work machinery on it at all in the general way?—The average cost in some places is 10s. per ton, in others £1, and in some places £1 2s. 6d. There is no general basis for calculation.

196. That is carting and cutting?—Yes, that is carting and cutting. Take Blenheim, flax has been cut there over a very large area for many years past, as far back as twenty years ago; it has been recut at several intervals, and, necessarily, the flax is becoming scarcer, and the people have to go further afield. They get a large area and give a price for it, or take it at so much per ton. It