

being of a lower quality, and because of the lower price in the London market they put it at a lower quality in their own estimation. All that would be done away with if we were to grade it in New Zealand.

334. What prospect is there of the raw material being kept up? Can you give any information on that point?—The present output of raw leaf, according to the late returns, is something like 210,000 tons. According to my own calculations, it is being cut so very rapidly that I do not think the supply can be kept up.

335. *Mr. Hamlin.*] How often can flax be cut? When it is cut, say, this year, when can it be cut again?—That depends on the district, or when you cut it. I have cut the same flax in two years. I have some other and I do not know whether it can be cut in three years' time. It depends a great deal on the drainage of the soil and other things.

336. And what would be the yield in these places?—About 30 tons an acre.

337. And what did you cut off originally?—We took off over 40 tons an acre.

338. You think in two years you could cut 30 tons?—Yes.

339. How much fibre is there in green flax?—That also varies a great deal. I have not been able to calculate. It depends on the time of the year. It is sometimes 9 tons and sometimes 8 tons, and, in fact, it has been as low as 7 tons. That would mean about 4 tons of dressed flax per acre at present cutting.

340. After two years, you think, 4 tons of fibre could be cut from it again?—Yes.

341. *The Chairman.*] From your knowledge, do you think it is possible that flax being sent Home damp would be in danger of burning a vessel from spontaneous combustion?—I do not think so.

342. You said in your evidence that it was dry and powdery?—I said there was a little heat. I have seen it powdery when decaying, but it cooled down.

343. In your opinion, if flax is damp, it depreciates very rapidly?—Yes, very rapidly, and the greatest care should be taken in putting it on board.

344. That it should not be damp?—Yes.

Mr. W. POLLARD, Flax-miller, of Blenheim, examined.

345. *The Chairman.*] You are engaged in the flax-milling industry?—Yes.

346. You have heard the evidence given by Mr. Gardner. If there is any point in it on which you can give information, or if you have any statement to make, will you give it first?—I think, with Mr. Gardner, that it is a very important matter that the Government should offer a substantial bonus for the invention of a machine which will materially reduce the cost of production and improve the quality. If not, I think the industry will die out very rapidly unless there is some improvement in the London market, and, as we all know, it concerns the employment of a very large amount of labour. It is very beneficial to the country, more so in some respects than the wool industry, for with a station, although you have a large number of men employed at certain times, you can materially reduce them during the slack season, while at a flax-mill you have the same number employed throughout the year. Unless there was a large bonus offered I think no one of engineering skill at the present time would think it worth his while to employ his brains and capital to try to invent and bring out a machine to effect the requirements when he has the idea that the industry might be closed at any time.

347. *The Chairman.*] You generally agree with the evidence given by Mr. Gardner, I believe?—Yes, in many respects; not altogether with the form of inspection. I think it would be too complicated, and appears to me to be beyond what the Government would undertake. I believe in having at the ports of shipment inspection, which could be done by just drawing one or two hanks out of every bale.

348. It has been suggested by one witness that one out of five bales should be examined?—I prefer the hanks being drawn out of the bales; because it would be no loss to the producer.

349. How would you get the hanks?—They could be drawn out of the bales and put aside and afterwards baled up. There are so many shippers who could have these samples supplied to them.

350. Do you think a bale should be condemned on one hank?—One or two hanks. An average bale consists of about ninety-eight hanks, and a hank could be drawn from either end, which would be only the work of a few minutes; and I think the mere fact of millers knowing that such inspection would take place would at once cause them to discontinue sending away inferior stuff.

351. Is there any other point on which you differ from Mr. Gardner?—No, I do not think there is, except that I would make the inspection compulsory.

352. You generally approve of the evidence he has given?—I do.

353. With regard to the value and prices and other statistics he gives?—He is very much above what we are in Marlborough. This time of the year is most expensive, but with me it never exceeds a cost of £14 for production.

354. The price does not exceed £14?—Apparently it does at other mills. I was rather surprised to hear Mr. Thomson's price was so high. Mr. Chaytor is lower than I am, being nearer town. I am twenty miles from town.

355. What do you pay for your raw material?—I pay £1 per ton royalty on the dressed fibre.

356. Mr. Gardner said he gave £1 per ton royalty. The difference must be in the system of production?—They pay higher prices here than we do. I know that when the boom occurred here, in the North Island, nearly the whole of our men cleared out.

357. *Mr. Wilson.*] Does the £14 include the price of cutting?—Yes, everything. I pay about 3s. per ton royalty on the raw material, which is about £1 per ton on the dressed fibre, 5s. for cutting, and about 6s. for cartage, which brings it to about 14s. a ton for the green flax at the mill.

358. Then, £1 per ton, you think, would be sufficient to include all possible charges for delivering green flax at the mill?—Yes.