

359. Then, do you consider that the difference in prices mentioned by Mr. Gardner and yours would be accounted for by the difference in wages?—Wages are higher in the North Island; and a lot of our men came over to this side, as they were able to get far better pay for the work here than we were giving.

360. *The Chairman.*] How many classes or grades do you think it would be advisable to have?—Three would be sufficient at first, at any rate, for if gone into too extensively it would be too complicated, and rather too much for the Government to undertake at present.

361. Do you think the principle of grading should be compulsory with all flax?—I think so, certainly. I quite agree with Mr. Gardner that too much has been said about inferior flax being sent to the London market. Of course I have seen a great deal of inferior flax, and heard of some which arrived in London having a deteriorating effect on the market.

362. *Mr. Hamlin.*] Do you think the bales would be sufficiently secured after two or three hanks had been drawn out?—It would not make the slightest difference; I have done it repeatedly myself—that is, before dumping. It is very hard to get them out, but it does not make any difference.

363. *Mr. Mackenzie.*] The only point of difference I can see between your view and Mr. Gardner's is that he thinks the whole bale should be opened while you think that one or two hanks would be enough?—Yes; you would not get good and bad fibre in the same bale. There are times when the machinery will not work well; when it does, the flax comes out good altogether. The same would apply when working badly. The shipper would be at the risk of having his bad hanks drawn.

364. *Mr. Wilson.*] This grading being in its infancy makes a great difference. Would it not be well to start opening every bale, in order that the people at Home would gain confidence? We acknowledge the great trouble, but would it not be advantageous?—Undoubtedly it would; but there would be no advantage in opening the bale unless you opened the hank. Just as with a fleece of wool, you have to open it out on a table.

365. *The Chairman.*] What prospect is there of the supply of raw material in Blenheim? Is there any chance of it running short?—I do not think so. In three years we can depend on getting it again. From two to three is the average: it depends on the soil.

366. You do not see any sign of the production ceasing?—Well, during the last ten years there has been no difference. The millers cut it and it grows again in three or four years. That has been going on for a very long time on many properties.

367. You do not think the output from Blenheim would be decreased on that account?—I do not think so. There would be almost the same quantity at the end of three or four years as at the time they commenced.

368. *Mr. Mackenzie.*] Assuming that a man had a patch, would it pay the owner to devote his ground to growing flax for what he gets for it?—He might do it just now, but not if the price for the raw material went lower. I know very few who would grow it, especially under present circumstances.

369. *Mr. Hamlin.*] You do not think it would pay to grow?—I do not think so. There was a large miller near my property. Although he had a large supply, he had an idea that there would be a scarcity in a few years, and went in for planting, but it did not do well.

370. He went in for transplanting, and it did not succeed?—Yes.

THURSDAY, 31ST JULY, 1890.

Mr. JOHNSTON DOUGAL, of Pokeno, examined.

371. *The Chairman.*] You were a flax-miller in the Auckland District?—Yes, at Pokeno.

372. What quantity of flax have you produced?—I used to prepare about 2 tons of flax a week.

373. At what cost did you prepare this flax?—About £15 a ton.

374. Do you take any particular flax, or do you take the flax as it comes to your hand?—All flax that comes unless it is rough. Any flax from sand-hills or sand-banks I do not take.

375. What machinery are you using?—The only machinery that I used was that made by Price.

376. Are you of opinion that any improvement can be made in flax machinery?—I cannot say, but flax might be improved a good deal in the washing.

377. Do you consider if a bonus were given by the Government it would lead to any improvement in machinery?—I could not give an opinion on that.

378. Have you taken into consideration the feasibility of improving flax by any chemical process?—No, I always thought the less chemicals used the better.

379. Have you found that flax deteriorates from the presence of too much moisture?—It stands a good deal of steeping, but once it is finished the drier it is kept the better.

380. Do you find that flax deteriorates, or is damaged by being packed when there is much moisture in it?—I should think so, most certainly; it would very soon rot.

381. You think it is necessary that the flax should be in a perfectly dry condition when shipped?—Yes, all flax should.

382. Do you think there should be any Governmental inspection and classifying of flax?—I do not know where you could get it well.

383. What would be the difficulty?—The ship's side would be the only place where it could be done. It could be taken down and examined and repacked. The merchants ought to be the judges. They ought to reject it altogether if not marketable.