

503. You are alluding to the amount procurable for the fibre for manufacturing into ropes?—Yes. When it goes into the English market in the first place there are two dumps put together. The broker then samples them. He looks over the whole line of this particular brand. Being a buyer he points out the worst one he can get. Then he shows the faults in it. This can be avoided by classifying the flax. Put two good dumps of the same brand together, then class it off, and let that shipment go as first or second class. Instead of that, the fibre leaving this port is really ruined. It is sent into the London market, or the American market, in such a state that we do not get real value for the stuff that we are manufacturing now.

504. Then, you say that sufficient care is not taken on the wharf to put the qualities together?—No, there is not.

505. That, in many cases, bales are dumped with others belonging to another shipment?—Of different quality, but the same brand.

506. The duty of the person appointed by the Government would be to classify it, and so divide it that the different qualities should go together?—Yes; everything should go in that way, instead of being jumbled up.

507. What staff would be required to classify in Wellington?—One man to classify, and a clerk to write reports out and send to the millers. That is all that would be required.

508. Then, we understand that two men, a classifier and a clerk, would be only required, in addition to the Harbour Board men?—Yes, that is all.

509. *Mr. Hamlin.*] Do you not think that flax coming into the Harbour Board sheds to be stored there would have to be opened to see what class of flax it is. Supposing there was inspection, in order to give a wholesome check, every bale would have to be opened?—No.

510. How are you going to tell the quality of the flax?—You take one bale and look at it; you open up the head of it, and, no matter how much the miller may comb it over, a man who understands the fibre thoroughly can tell the quality by feeling it; he can tell whether the flax is up to the proper standard. I could tell what sort of twine a ball would be, whether it was musty or anything else, by its odour. If you are used to the fibre you can tell the quality by squeezing it.

511. You can tell whether it is perfectly and sufficiently dressed simply by looking at the end?—Yes; if I saw any default in a hank I could detect it.

512. And that would leave the flax thoroughly fit for shipment?—Yes.

513. You are sure of that?—Yes.

514. By looking at a hank of it you could say it was properly dressed at both ends?—Yes. After I had opened one bale perhaps in ten, and found out the miller and the register of his brand, that would give me a guarantee and some confidence in the miller. After I had been watching his flax from time to time I should very soon get at the bottom of the defects.

515. You consider that would be sufficient to enable the Government Inspector to report to the Government that such and such flax was first class and second class, and that that report would be received in the London market?—Yes, it would be received.

516. Do you think the Government would be justified in appointing an Inspector to have such an inspection as that?—Yes, and to report to the miller.

517. How could you report unless you examined the flax?—I could examine it. I would take the worst bale out of ten bales of the brand to be sent to the London or American market. You can tell the quality of the fibre in a moment by looking at it.

518. You can tell if there is too much wet?—Yes, and whether it is up to the proper standard, or whether it is sufficiently scutched or not.

519. *The Chairman.*] We understand that you consider that if an Inspector was appointed by the Government here it would be necessary that a preliminary part of his duty would be to visit the various mills and see the system of baling and the system of manufacture?—Yes.

520. And having seen the system of manufacture in the various mills, an examination of one in five of the output of the various mills would give you sufficient knowledge to enable you to classify?—Yes.

521. *Mr. Hamlin.*] Have you any knowledge of flax fifteen or sixteen years ago having been prepared by the machines at present used and sold in the London market for £51 or £52 a ton?—Yes, I am aware that that is a fact. That was done by the company I was managing—the Auckland Rope-spinning Company. The company's mill had a great run on the fibre. We shipped it Home direct in our chartered vessels.

522. If the machines in the old days were able to turn out flax at a price of over £50 a ton, what prevents them from doing so now?—Well, when the fibre went into the market at that time it was a new thing; manila had not been much used. It has not been a great length of time in the market, although it is a good fibre. It is a new fibre when compared with the Italian fibre. They had not found out that the gum was in the New Zealand fibre, and as soon as they found that it would not stand the salt water the prices went down.

523. In the event of the gum being extracted from the fibre it would hold its own?—Yes.

524. *Major Steward.*] It does not hold the tar?—No, it does not hold it; the tar squeezes out in manufacture.

525. *Mr. Hamlin.*] You do not think that it is from carelessness the price has been reduced?—Yes, I do think so.

526. You think the flax prepared at the present time is up to the old standard?—Yes. In some of the mills at the present time there is just as much care used as then.

527. You speak generally of your knowledge through the colony?—Yes.

528. You consider from what you saw here and elsewhere that the product is equally as good as it used to be?—At the present moment there has been such a rush in the fibre trade that there are men who have not taken the precaution such as the old millers have taken. They are a long way out; they do not know how to prepare the fibre.