

529. *Mr. Walker.*] Have you sufficient confidence in the London market that it would accept our classification and give us value for the improved qualities?—Well, we could get returns in four months. The whole matter could be proved in a short time. Some could be sent Home by the mail-boats in less time.

530. Are the conditions of sale at Home satisfactory to the miller who turns out a good article?—Without a doubt they are.

531. They ought, therefore, to respond to any efforts we make to improve the article?—Yes.

532. You have sufficient knowledge of the London market to say that you are satisfied as to conditions of sale and everything being favourable to a good article?—Yes.

533. Except the method of selling two bales together that are not equal?—That is against the fibre.

534. Why cannot you prevent that?—Well, there is nobody to prevent it. The men in the sheds get instructions to take such-and-such flax away. It goes whether good or bad. It is not their business to pick out the fibre at all.

535. If you consign your fibre to the broker in London, is it not his duty to protect your interest?—Yes. The stuff is taken into the room in the dump. If you take it out of the dump the whole thing would be loose. They only undump certain bales to look at as samples.

536. But they are all numbered?—Yes.

537. And catalogued?—Yes.

538. Cannot you give instructions to the broker to see that only those numbers that ought properly to go are to be sold?—Yes, but they are not all to go together.

539. If they were all to go?—Yes.

540. Then the fault lies with the people in Wellington?—Yes.

541. Why cannot you prevent that?—It has not been prevented.

542. Wool is treated very much in the same way?—Yes, there are men to classify wool in the shearing-sheds at the stations.

543. Why cannot the same care be taken with flax?—It is not done.

544. Well, whose fault is that? Surely the miller and merchant between them ought to be able to do so?—In the first place—we will take Wellington for example, where there are four or five or six good merchants—in the Foxton district, which is a large district for flax, each one of these houses has a representative there. The miller goes into these stores and offers his flax for sale, we will say, at £20 a ton. The next-door miller—perhaps half a mile away, or less—goes into the same store and offers his fibre for sale, and he says, “I want £20 10s. a ton for mine.” The storekeeper says, “I am getting the flax of so-and-so for £20 a ton.” Very well, that fibre is taken as at the £20 10s. The very man who has manufactured the flax for £20 is £2 better flax than the man who asks £20 10s. The point then comes that really the flax industry, up till just of late, has been run—one merchant with a representative in the country running the other to buy the stuff so as to supply the millers with stores. A lot of the flax has been spoiled by one buying against the other.

545. Is that done without knowledge?—They have no knowledge whatever. I have known merchants here go into the market and bid for flax at a certain figure, and really they have lost £6 a ton on it; they have not known the quality of the fibre; they did not understand what they were buying.

546. Do they buy to ship on their own account, or for a firm in Wellington?—They buy for a firm in Wellington.

547. Does not the firm in Wellington object when they get these bad bargains put on their hands?—Yes, certainly; and sometimes they discharge the men immediately.

548. And you do not think that the natural course of experience will improve the trade sufficiently. It requires Government classification as the best and quickest method of correcting these evils?—Yes.

549. *The Chairman.*] With regard to the management of the flax in the field, I think I understood you to say that, for convenience of working, the flax is taken in from the field in a damp state?—Yes. A great number of mills are let by contract, to turn out the flax at so much a ton. The fibre, if it is left to be thoroughly dry, yields a great amount of tow. They take it in a little damp, so that in the scutching the tow does not depart from the fibre; and thus the fibre is not up to the proper standard for rope-spinning.

550. You say that sufficient care is not taken to insure that the flax is dry when it leaves the manufacturers?—That is so. The last witness stated that he had known fibre to be kept for two months, so as to make it “mellow;” that is the technical term used. I quite agree with him in that statement.

551. You agree with the last witness that when flax is stored in sheltered places it becomes “mellow,” and capable of being worked readily?—Yes.

FRIDAY, 1ST AUGUST, 1890.

Mr. A. P. SEYMOUR, M.H.R., examined.

*Cultivation.*

*Witness:* Would require first-class land, altogether too good to pay to devote to it. Draining swamps would pay better, and, I think, give better results in larger crops of flax. Planting will take many years before a crop results. Plants set in early September, 1889, have now four small meagre shoots from 2ft. 6in. to 3ft. long, with no sign of any fresh fans; truncheons of old roots did not in any case grow.

553. *Mr. Hamlin.*] What sort of land was it that you planted your flax on, Mr. Seymour?—It was old flax-land on the banks of the Manawatu River, and many years ago formed part of an old sheep-yard. I grew in it garden stuff which would have been fit to show anywhere; it was exceptionally good.