

554. Had it been damp sandy soil at one time?—Yes; that moist soil which is by the side of the rivers.

555. And sandy?—Yes.

556. The roots could not strike into any clay?—No.

557. With reference to the flax at Foxton, was not that growing on sandy soil?—I should not call it sandy soil. It is the swamp flax. The flax is grown in swamps which have been partially drained.

558. Was it sandy at the bottom?—I should say rather peat than sand, but I should not call them clayey swamps. I should not say the fibre which came off the swamps was bad by any means. The fibre was good; but the objection I have to it, from my own experience in Marlborough, is that the flax in the swamps is too old to make first-class fibre.

559. *Mr. Marchant.*] I gather from you, Mr. Seymour, that you do not consider that planting flax is at all likely to be a commercial success?—I do not.

560. As to this swamp flax, would the second growth that would come on when the old flax had been cut away be of better quality than that cut first?—I think it would be a first-class quality.

561. Do you think draining the swamps will increase largely the growth of the crop, and also the quality of the leaf?—It will increase the area of flax-land available for dressing.

562. For what reason?—Because as soon as you have drained a piece of swamp it grows flax. Directly you take the superabundant moisture off the swamp the raupo dies, and the flax takes its place.

563. Do you think many large areas of swamp which exists in that district might be profitably dealt with in that way—drawing off the water by draining, and leaving them to grow flax?—I am sure many thousands of acres could be dealt with so.

564. With regard to the second growth of flax, you say that you think it will take three years from the first cutting, I understand, to give a fair crop, and four years for a good one. What weight of leaf would you consider a fair crop obtainable from the second cutting?—At three years, probably from 20 tons to 25 tons to the acre. I think the fourth year would add another 10 tons.

565. That would be from 30 to 35 tons?—Yes; I have got 40 tons off an acre, but that was exceptional.

566. In four years?—No, old flax.

567. What would be the quantity of fibre per ton obtainable from the leaf do you think?—The quantity of fibre from the leaf would not be so great as from the old flax.

568. What would you assume it to be roughly?—It would probably take 8 tons of green flax to make 1 ton of fibre by our present process, whereas 7 tons will make it now. The average of a year's work at my mill was 6 tons 18½ cwt.

569. That is of old flax?—Yes.

570. We had figures given to us by Mr. Gardner, flax-miller, a few days ago, to the effect that in two and a half years he would get 30 tons of leaf as a second crop, and that that would yield 7½ tons—that is to say, he would get 1 ton of fibre from 7½ tons of leaf, making, in other words, 4 tons of fibre to the acre after an interval of two and a half years?—I should think that rather exceptional. Such experience as I have had would not warrant me in coming to such a conclusion.

Quality of Flax, Foxton District.

Witness: Is chiefly coarse and long, only can be classed as medium hemp when dressed. Cause: age and length; most of the flax is far too old, the leaves are past their prime. First-class sample may be made when the beds are cut again; single leaves will grow 7ft. in a few spring and summer months, but three years required for a fair crop, and four years for a good crop; at six years old leaves, though fair, are getting past their prime, many being badly spotted with black blight.

Grading.

Witness: Should if possible be arranged and made compulsory, must be by bale, and not by the hank. One Inspector in each principal port, with power to open any bales he may choose, could do all the work. Any hank can be pulled out of a bale, examined, and placed between two of the same brand before dumping. Cost of their inspection would be very trifling, and could be charged with the storage and dumping, and all this should be paid by shipper, not as now by ship in the first instance. Present cost of dumping, being now paid by ship, is charged at most extravagant rates. Inspection by hank would be far too costly, and could only be done successfully by a company buying up the flax at low rates and repacking, and company probably would not secure the best and evenest brands, because they would not give as much as the merchants.

571. *The Chairman.*] What we understand from you is that the work is done by the ship in the first instance?—Yes.

572. Will you explain that?—The ship pays for the dumping; that is the point. We pay for it in the end. The producer has to pay for all these things, and we pay at an exorbitant rate for it.

573. What you suggest, Mr. Seymour, is that a contract should be made by the producer with the Harbour Board authorities?—Yes. The producer should, in all cases, first pay these charges and get a rebate from the ship.

574. *Mr. Hamlin.*] Do I understand you to desire that all the bales should be opened here?—No, I say "with power to open." One Inspector in each port with power to open any bales he might choose could do all the work. I do not expect that he would open probably more than one in twenty.

575. Do you think that sufficient to warrant a Government Inspector in affixing his brand of first, second, or third class to the flax?—I think quite so. He could pull open the hanks and see