

—I think it should be as substantial as the colony can afford. Ten thousand pounds has been mentioned, and that would not, I think, be excessive, when you look at the annual output and what would be saved to the colony if the cost of production were made £5 a ton.

589. *Mr. Marchant.*] You did not touch upon the enhanced value of any superior method of dressing, in your suggestions as to the conditions for the bonus. You do not appear to think that there is any hope of the fibre fetching greatly increased prices at Home through any greatly improved method?—I will come to that presently.

Mr. Marchant: I thought that would be included in the evidence as to the bonus.

590. *Mr. Walker.*] Are there any complaints from Home of fibre having heated?—There are instances where it has rotted. Mr. Chaytor had a lot returned rotten, ex “Tainui,” and on inquiry into the reason of it, when he went Home, he found it was on account of a port-hole of the ship having been left open negligently. The fibre was rotten.

591. You have no doubts in your own mind that it will not fire?—Not the slightest; it will not fire.

592. There was the case of a Frisco steamer which put back with its cargo on fire, and it was hinted, at all events, if not definitely stated, that it was the flax?—It was said to have been accidentally lighted by a match.

593. *Mr. Hamlin.*] I think it must have been a match, as Mr. Seymour suggests, or tobacco dropped from a pipe into one of the bales?—Of course it is highly inflammable.

Bad Fibre sent Home.

Witness: Many mills were set up by persons who knew nothing of the business, nor realised the necessity of keeping their strippers in good going order. Also, from various causes, the monthly output did not equal their calculations; but wages had to be paid, and hemp was brought in and packed in a semi-manufactured state in order to receive advances on delivery. Merchants bought most recklessly, without any inspection, and thus contributed largely to the evil.

Freights and Charges.

Witness: Are very high, and do not appear likely to give way. A few years back frozen meat could not be profitably shipped owing to these charges being excessive. Shipowners, rather than see trade collapse, met the grazier halfway, the result being a grand permanent industry.

General Remarks.

Witness: This business requires and deserves a substantial profit, because (1) no company will insure mill or plant; (2) all damage at sea is held to be at shippers' risk, even if caused by negligence; (3) wear-and-tear (ordinary) is very heavy, but, in addition, extraordinary expenses are often incurred by running machinery at so high a speed and with the peculiar jerking strain which feeding the leaves causes; (4) losses by fire in the flax-beds last summer. I had a fine block of flax, which I had just begun cutting, destroyed, together with many chains of tramway leading to it, and not less than 1,000 tons of flax. I have no faith in the production of a spinning-fibre from Phormium with anything like our machinery at present in use. If it is ever produced it will be probably by chemistry, and only out of young small leaves. Maoris always selected their leaves carefully, and, I think, never used them 12ft. long as we do, and only took out of each leaf about half of the best ripened and finest fibre which lay on the surface.

594. *Mr. Hamlin.*] Is it not possible for you to so press your bales at the mill that any dumping that may be done at the Harbour Board or on the ship becomes useless?—We could not do that without each of us purchasing hydraulic machinery, and that is too expensive.

ROBERT BROWN, of Pitone, examined.

595. *The Chairman.*] What are you, Mr. Brown?—I am a flax-miller, and was engaged in flax-milling many years, but I am now engaged in rope-making.

596. *Mr. Walker.*] What part of the colony are you most acquainted with?—All about here. I was dressing flax at a mill in Wainui-o-mata. I am now engaged in rope-making at Pitone.

597. *The Chairman.*] You have heard the evidence given by Mr. Seymour, Mr. Brown?—Yes.

598. Do you generally agree with what he has said?—I do.

599. Do you remember what he said about the cultivation of flax?—Yes.

600. Have you had any experience in its cultivation?—None whatever; but I thoroughly believe if flax was cultivated in good land that it might be brought to something very good.

601. *Mr. Walker.*] It would pay for cultivation?—I believe it would if properly cultivated—the young offshoots taken and transplanted in good soil.

602. Still, you have no experience in growing; it is a matter of opinion on your part?—That is all, sir.

603. *The Chairman.*] Can you tell us how often you cut the flax at Wainui-o-mata?—Once in three and sometimes in three and a half years—that was, not destroying the heart and blade. We had to be very careful in watching the cutters that the young blades were not cut, and in three years we would have a good crop again. It was good flax.

604. Was it equal in weight to the first crop?—I could not say. I did not note that at the time.

605. Was the new flax capable of producing as much fibre as the old flax?—I could not say. I did not note that at the time; but the flax was far better.

606. Did you find the flax cut in certain months of the year of better quality than that cut at others?—Yes.

607. What months of the year do you say it is best to cut flax in?—Before it commences to flower.