

was adopted at that time—I do not know how far it is still the case—was very irregular. The shape, and the weight, and the mean bulk, was different from different mills, and the result was that it was very difficult to classify. Of course, when the flax gets to London everything is looked upon as New Zealand if it comes from New Zealand. We get a general credit founded on samples of the worst quality in the market; and if the bales are not made similar to those bales competed with, it creates a great difficulty. That was the evidence we got from the brokers in London. Intrinsically I do not see any great difference between baling in one shape or another, or in one weight or another, but the value was affected by our bales not being in accordance with the bales of other substances. To remedy this we got out a complete set of bales—of competing fibres. These were exhibited and described, so that the mill-owners and the shippers could see exactly what they were going to compete with in London. It would be a very useful thing to have that done again. That was done in 1871. There was another action taken at that time which should be again revived: that is, to have a set of samples of our own flax classified by the London brokers into what they considered to be first, second, and third quality; and that is the basis upon which the millers should be induced to prepare their flax and brand it. I still have some of the original samples that we got at that date, but they have now got so old and dry that they would not give a fair indication of what is at present considered in London as first-, second-, or third-class flax.

822. Do you consider the time has arrived in the flax development when it is necessary to have proper Government classification?—The classification is done in London. There is no classification that we could impose which would have any weight with the buyer in London, unless it was founded on his dictum.

823. That is, buying the standards of flax available here?—I do not see that you want to classify beyond those standards.

824. *Mr. Walker.*] We want to ascertain that the flax goes Home according to those standards?—Of course it is the interest of every mill-owner to make his flax equal to the best standard he can attain. It is difficult to guard against a mill-owner, through indifference or otherwise, classifying his flax as first standard when he knows it to be second.

825. *The Chairman.*] What has been stated in evidence before the Committee is this: That classification here and governmental inspection here would give great confidence to buyers in the Old Country?—Well, that is a matter on which I could not give any opinion. It would surprise me if it did; but I do not know sufficient to speak upon it. The classification could best be done by the mill-owners saying what is the first class, and what is the second class, and being able to say how far they can work under the conditions at their particular mills—which class they could work the stuff up to. It might be a useful thing for a Government Inspector to go round the mills and see what kind of stuff they were baling up. We may assist them, because it is so obviously for the advantage of the producer to classify his material correctly. It would be of no use whatever if bales were sent Home with the miller's name on them and marked first-class, and that the broker found they were but second-class. That would create a suspicion in the mind of the broker ever afterwards. However, that seems a matter in trade which usually rectifies itself.

826. *Major Steward.*] It appears that when flax goes Home there is no indication that it belongs to any particular class; it is simply shipped as New Zealand flax?—Well, that should be forbidden, not only in regard to flax but other produce also. It should go by the brands, and the seller should take the responsibility of selling an inferior article.

827. *Mr. Hamlin.*] Should not the Inspector have the power of stopping flax going Home if bad, and making the miller take it back?—I do not know; there would be compensation then, I suppose.

828. *Mr. Walker.*] You are aware that certain products in the Old Country are guaranteed by means of Government inspection—that packages of butter, and herrings, are branded as having passed Government inspection?—I did not know that butter was so inspected, but I think herrings are; but that is for a different purpose than trade classification.

829. I believe it preserves the quality of the manufactured article?—I am quite in favour of branding. I hope I was not misunderstood in that respect.

830. I mean to say branding by a Government stamp, to show that the article inspected is what it professes to be?—I do not think it would be applicable to flax. There would be a great practical difficulty in applying it to flax.

831. *The Chairman.*] The evidence generally is quite in favour of it. May we understand that you will make some suggestions about offering a bonus, and regulating the trade in flax?—Well, I will endeavour to do so. I will either make suggestions or say I cannot. It is a much more difficult subject than appears on the surface.

832. *Mr. Hamlin.*] Was there not a bonus offered in 1865?—There was a bonus offered for a new machine sent out from England, and a great many of them were used in Nelson. With reference to the question of branding, when I say I am in favour of branding, it must be done according to the London standard, and it must be done by the people who sell the flax. It may be a Government brand or anything else, but I do not think the responsibility of classifying the flax, putting the brand upon it, and standing the brunt of any disagreement between the classifiers of the flax and the buyers in London should fall upon the Government, and not upon the producers. I dislike the idea of allowing the Government to be put between, so as to save the producers of the flax from the ordinary commercial pressure that is brought to bear on him if he offers for sale an inferior article—an article inferior to what he professes it to be. It is the case with wool. According to law the wool has to be branded with the name of the producer. In the same manner the flax should be branded, and it should be classified for the convenience of the purchasers in London.

833. *The Chairman.*] It has been given in evidence that the purchasers in London would know they were buying flax up to a certain standard when vouched for by a Government Inspector who had no interest in the production. That has been stated here in evidence very strongly?—Do you mean at the Government expense?