

4. Your attention has been chiefly directed to improving machinery in order to prevent a great deal of the waste that takes place at the present time?—Yes, preventing the waste, and saving the labour, and improving the fibre.

5. What are the difficulties that flax-producers have to contend against at the present time?—In the first instance, the miller has to pay for the cutting, carting, washing, stripping, and everything else, and then throw 4 cwt. or 5 cwt. to the ton away in tow; if plenty of mills running, no sale for this article. By proper machinery  $3\frac{1}{2}$  cwt. can be saved, besides time in bleaching. I do not know whether Mr. Gardner has sent in his report, but you would see from that the result of my last trial.

6. No, it has not yet been sent to us. What are the difficulties that the flax, when manufactured, has to contend with in the markets?—It has to contend with sisal, and, more particularly, with manila. I do not think that sisal will be grown to the extent it has been in the past, because the Government of Bermuda some time ago offered a bonus of £2 per ton, I am told, on all sisal exported, but they have since withdrawn it, and the quantity manufactured is therefore likely to decrease. In 1895 the quantity manufactured was from 19,000 to 45,000 bales per month (350 lb. bales).

7. Can you recommend any steps that would lead to flax successfully competing with manila and sisal?—Yes; but the only thing, I think, is by means of improved machinery, especially in regard to the dressing. There is also, as I have stated, the possibility of saving time, and preventing the loss of tow, and improving the quality of the fibre. In my opinion, there is too much waste in the production.

8. Do the producers find the market regular, or variable?—Very variable. Of course, the price of manila rules the flax-market. If manila is cheap it affects the flax. There is another thing I may mention: I believe the flax stretches more than the manila. I think that will be found to be the case in experience. The cause of this may be that the flax is not soft enough to spin up tightly, and when a strain is put upon it it stretches. This is only a suggestion. The cause of that should be ascertained by the Committee by means of experiments. Private individuals cannot do these things. I am aware that people will not buy flax rope as against manila, but I do not know that the true reason for this has yet been ascertained. It is not as soft as the manila, and it is not spun so closely. These samples [produced], washed and scutched by my machines, are much softer than those by another machine [also produced], and have been bleached in half the time. These samples treated by my machines are worth from £1 to £1 10s. more than the others, because they are ready for the rope-making machine without further dressing.

9. *Mr. McLean.*] What about the gum?—I do not know much about the gum, but I know there is gummy or some other matter in the flax, and it holds the fibres together. If, however, you dissolved the gum, as it is popularly called, there would be no continuous fibre. Manila, I believe, is one long thread. If you were to boil this flax it would all go into short pieces about three or four inches long, or perhaps a little shorter. I think that if the thing is properly looked after, and if the matter is gone into thoroughly, the fibre can be improved, and be sought after instead of having to push it.

10. *Mr. Wason.*] Are there different qualities of flax?—Yes, there are several different qualities or varieties; I think, over twenty. Flax grown on dry land is generally considered better than that grown on the swamp.

11. But it is the same flax right through?—Well, there is the pink edge, and the black edge, and several other varieties.

12. And, as a gentleman experienced in the flax industry, have you any idea as to the best quality to cultivate?—No; you cannot pick it out when cutting for a mill.

13. Can you give us any idea as to how much native flax there is left in the district?—There is a good deal left, but it is being grubbed up as fast as possible in some districts, and fostered in others.

14. What I want to know is if there is much of the native flax left?—Mostly down Foxton way; but, of course, there is a good deal left in the Island.

15. Do you think this Committee should recommend the Government to give a bonus for improved machinery for dressing flax?—I should think so, considering that a flax-mill employs more hands than a station. Directly and indirectly, I suppose a flax-mill employs fifteen to twenty hands.

16. But you are unable to give us any idea as to how much flax there is left?—No, I have no idea of that; you can get it from statistics.

17. Do you think it would pay to cultivate flax?—I believe it would if you had the market for it, and if you brought the article to perfection. At the present time merchants take our flax when they cannot get manila, and now that there is a spurt I think the Government should take steps to produce an article that will command a sale of itself. Flax is now at £15 10s. per ton, but the merchants are taking seven months' contracts, so you may be sure it is going up. I mean £15 10s. here.

18. *Mr. Symes.*] I thought it was £25 or £26. Is £15 10s. profitable?—Yes.

19. *Mr. Wason.*] Would it pay farmers to grow flax if they got that for it?—I do not know what you reckon on.

20. Suppose £8 or £8 10s. an acre was paid for the land, would it pay to grow flax on that?—No; I do not think it would pay if the land was more than £6 an acre. I could not recommend a man to give more than £6 an acre for flax land, unless the article is improved and a better price always maintained; then a better royalty could be given.

21. *Mr. McLean.*] Will flax grow on poor land?—I do not think so; but I have seen swamps drained in this colony, and directly the draining is completed, up comes the flax. It is indigenous to the soil.