

22. *Mr. Symes.*] Was this flax of yours [produced] washed before being bleached?—It is washed as it comes from the machine, which saves the labour of two men, or about 10s. a ton.

23. I understood you to say it was bleached inside?—Yes, not in the sun, though I may say that the shed was open.

24. And by that process there is a great saving in the tow, as it does not get entangled so much?—The scutcher is not yet complete, and I do not know exactly what the saving will be, but it will be considerable. The stuff will be ready for the rope-maker at once.

25. What do you think about the sending-away of falsely got-up flax: do you think it has had anything to do with damaging the market?—Yes; but what is the cause? A merchant gets an order to buy so much flax, and he enters into a contract with the miller. Perhaps the flax is low—say, £12 per ton. Then it rises to £20 per ton. The man at once becomes dissatisfied and careless, and wants to throw over the contract. But, on the other hand, a merchant makes a contract for, say, £18 per ton, and the flax goes down to £12 per ton. He is not satisfied and rejects, and says it is not up to the standard. That is one of the causes, therefore, why a grader should be appointed.

26. What do you consider the lowest possible price at which a good article such as this [produced] could be turned out?—I should say at about £10. It depends upon cost of the green flax. It makes a difference where you are situated. Take my own case. My green flax would cost about 15s. a ton or more as at present situated; if I had the mill on the field, much less. In Foxton, however, they can get it landed for 10s. to 12s. a ton at present.

27. How many tons of green flax does it take to make 1 ton of dressed flax?—About 7½.

28. But with your new process it will not take nearly so much?—Not if you save the tow, because nearly 25 per cent. of the dressed fibre is thrown away after all this expenditure is made on it. No industry in the world would stand that.

29. Do you know of your own knowledge that the sisal-grass crop has failed in the Island to a very considerable extent?—I think they have stopped cultivating. I have a small paragraph here which I sent to the *Evening Post*, and which appeared in 1895. It reads: "A correspondent forwards us the following cutting from an Auckland paper, which will, he thinks, be interesting to our readers, and the colony generally: 'In a recent report on the trade and commerce of Vera Cruz the subject of Yucatan hemp is referred to. This hemp is now generally known as sisal, from the fact that the fibre was first exported from Sisal, a small coast-port about twenty-seven miles west of Progreso. In view of the low price that has ruled for sisal hemp for some time past, it will be of interest to know that the export from Vera Cruz varies from 19,000 to 45,000 bales per month, the average weight of each bale being about 350 lb. It has been remarked that this year (1895) will have the maximum quantity of land under hemp-cultivation in Yucatan, which means that the production of hemp has reached its limit. Under the existing circumstances of low prices, high monetary exchange, and the scarcity of Indian labour, many of the farmers are planting maize instead of replanting hemp. New land, as well as old hemp-growing areas, is now being used for growing maize and other products.'" The sisal, I may say, is not as good as our hemp. I think rope-makers prefer our hemp.

30. *Mr. Symes.*] I dare say the Spanish-American war will account for the rise?—Exactly; but if sisal becomes scarce this will help us.

31. *Mr. Duthie.*] I know that you have given a good deal of attention to this subject, and that you have spent a great deal of time and money upon it. In any of your experiments, have you hit upon any idea to prevent the tendency of the flax rope to break off short after it has been in use for a time: is there not something in the fibre that causes the thread to break a few months after the rope is in use?—I do not know about that. I think, as I said, that should be discovered by experiment by this Committee.

32. But none of your own machines has been devoted to experiments in that direction?—No; they have been confined to the matter of dressing. I may say that in 1871 I was connected with Mr. Kebbell's mill. At that time Mr. Kebbell was conducting some experiments for Dr. Hector in regard to the durability of the flax fibre, and I was asked to look after the experiments. I did so, and the result is embodied in this book, which contains Dr. Hector's report. The result shows that the New Zealand flax, after being saturated with whale-oil, gives nearly five and a half times the durability.

33. Do you know why this idea has not been adopted?—No.

34. Are you aware that none of the steamers on the coast nor the Government railways use the flax rope to any extent?—They will not have it. I would like to know why.

35. Is it because it has the tendency to break off short?—I want to know the reason, but I think it is for the Committee to get at that.

36. As a witness you can only say you do not know?—Yes.

37. Binder-twine is another direction in which there is a good deal of consumption of the article: why is not flax used in that connection?—I do not know why it should not be used in that respect. I think it is only prejudice.

38. They do not use it in New Zealand?—I am quite sure they would not know that fibre [produced], if spun, from manila.

39. As a matter of fact, there is very little of it used?—I do not know. You people, the merchants, should know better.

40. Are you aware that it was largely adopted some five or six years ago in America and then discontinued?—I believe it was.

41. Do you know the reason for that?—No.

42. Is it not that the flax is so much heavier that it is safer and cheaper to use manila, even at the higher market price?—That is what I am trying to get at.

43. It is a question of whether it should be substituted?—I think it would be substituted if it could be produced to answer the same purpose as manila.