

10. I understand that when ropes made from New Zealand flax are a time in use they are liable to break. The railways are giving up using New Zealand in favour of manila?—They do not want to be bothered with it.

11. Their sympathies would be with the local article against manila had they not some difficulty with it?—Manila is the strongest fibre known.

12. Could you offer any evidence to show that this defect could be remedied?—No.

13. From your knowledge of the fibre it cannot be remedied. The fibre is a larger fibre and much heavier?—It is about 20 per cent.

14. Do you think that, from the evidence which you had before you, there was any method of reducing the weight?—If better dressed it might reduce the weight. When jute was introduced into Dundee in 1833 they would have nothing to do with it. Now they make it so much better.

15. Is there any hope of it being better dressed at a reasonable cost?—We have the chemical process that will help it. The tow is much less.

16. I understand the inquiry of the Commission was as to the making of a marketable article. So far nothing has been accomplished?—Yes; we have recommended the Government to try the chemical process. It is possible they will try it.

17. Unless it is very expensive?—It is not very expensive; the saving would be about £2 a ton.

FRIDAY, 23RD SEPTEMBER, 1898.

Mr. ROBERT GARDNER, Piaka, Koputuroa, examined.

1. *The Chairman.*] You are Mr. Robert Gardner, of Piaka, Manawatu?—Yes.

2. You desire to give some evidence before the Committee on the question of the encouragement of the flax industry?—Yes.

3. How long have you been connected with the growing of flax?—Ten years, now.

4. In what capacity?—I bought out a flax estate at Piaka, Manawatu, about 1,000 acres altogether. I have a flax-mill there, and had one at Waikanae, and one at Foxton. So I have been pretty well into the flax industry for ten years now. I continue to run it. I have gone on with it all through. I was appointed by the Government to go round to every one desiring to compete for the bonus for improvement in the dressing of flax. I think we all recognise flax is most profitable now. We know what flax is. I have been twice round the colony. I have just come off the last Commission, and we have published our report. So far we have seen two things that we think will be hopeful. One is a washing-machine at Featherston. Unfortunately, at the time that we went round (the Commission, Messrs. Duncan, Rutherford, and myself) to inspect Mr. Toogood's machine, we could not recommend anything at all to him for it. It was not working well; but he applied to the Minister for a reinspection of it. We went there, and we are of opinion now that there is something in it. It washes the flax, and generally much depends upon the thorough washing of the flax as to its quality. The other is a departure altogether from the ordinary way of dressing, which is a sort of grinding process. It is a chemical process. A man named Gillman experimented up at Auckland. Sir James Hector has been experimenting on the effect of alkali, but by it we find we lose the colour. However, Mr. Gillman has discovered by the use of arsenic he can, we believe, still retain the colour. We can get a fibre clean and dry. We could never get the colour back by Sir James Hector's plan. The colour, of course, affects the fibre in the English market. Gillman has not money enough to carry the thing through, and we have applied to the Government asking if they will grant money for carrying out Gillman's plan. We think there is something advantageous in it. I saw him take the flax, put it into a copper boiler, and boil it. After it was boiled for four hours he passed it through a pair of rollers, washed it, and left the fibre entirely free. If that can be done in quantity, and at a price, it will certainly solve the difficulty. It will make our flax very much more valuable. I believe a very great deal of the damage to our flax is the result of the present machine-dressing. It is put over the field, and exposed to atmospheric influences that lessen the strength of the fibre. We have been trying to get over the bruising of the cells. There is no grinding in Gillman's process, and we think it ought to be encouraged. I do not know whether the Government will consent to do that or not. I reckon that we have got about twenty mills working at present, and we turn out nearly sixty thousand pounds' worth of flax. We were turning out something like four hundred thousand pounds' worth some years ago.

5. Have you anything you can suggest to the Committee that would be in the direction of encouraging the production, or improving the trade in any way?—In the first place, we, by Gillman's process, if successful, cheapen the production charges.

6. Successfully?—Very considerably, as well as improve the quality. We calculate that we will be able to turn it out for £6 per ton; if so, we will bring it to about the price of jute. Our fibre is vastly superior to jute.

7. *Mr. Wason.*] With reference to cheapening the production, I do not quite follow you?—We think it will take less manipulation, less labour, to produce the flax by this process.

8. I do not understand what you mean by the term production?—It will decrease the cost of production.

9. That is supposing you have the raw material delivered to you?—Oh, yes.

10. You use a wrong expression in production, you mean cheapening the manufacture, do you not?—I have not taken into consideration the green flax. The royalty may be increased by growers of the green leaf.