

53. Mixed rope does not bear the strain so well?—I do not think it is so strong as the pure manila. I think that arises from the dressing. Ours is crushed, and the other is scraped off.

54. How do you account for such a tremendous falling-off in the value of the export in flax? What do you attribute that to?—To the increased output of sisal. There was a great effort made to cultivate the sisal. The Governor of the Bahamas took a personal interest in the cultivation of the sisal. There are three principal white fibres in the world—the manila, the sisal, and the New Zealand flax. The sisal increased in production to a very much greater extent. The increased quantity coming into the market brought down the price, and that we think was the cause of the reduction of the manila and New Zealand hemp. The Bahamas have gone back into maize-growing, and from what we see by the papers we are more hopeful that the price will continue at a more payable rate. It is almost impossible to tell with certainty what the cause always is for the lowering of prices of any produce.

55. *Mr. Wason.*] I do not understand what you mean by this royalty, 1s. 6d. a ton on green flax?—The royalty is this: if we cut flax from anybody else's property we pay them so much a ton, and term that a royalty.

56. How does that 1s. 6d. a ton agree with your former remark that you paid from 1s. to 3s. a ton for green flax?—We pay a royalty of 1s. per ton on the green flax that we cut, or 1s. 6d. or 2s., or 3s., whatever the market-price may be.

57. You told us you paid 2s. to 3s.—that is, by way of royalty—and your labour was additional?—Yes.

58. We had it in evidence the other day that the best flax was grown upon comparatively speaking poor land, worth about £6 an acre. I understand from your remarks you hardly agree with that?—No, I do not agree with that.

59. You think the best flax would grow on the best land?—Yes; I suppose our average of blade is 10 ft. long. The soil is wonderfully good, and there is nothing to beat it in the Manawatu.

60. You think that that land could be more profitably employed growing flax than it would be in any other way?—Yes, I certainly do. In our own case we have a flood over our flax-land about twice a year, and it is well drained.

61. It requires no soil-cultivation?—No.

62. Do you think there is much of that land in New Zealand?—A great deal of it. There is, for instance, the Makerua, or the Manawatu Railway Company's swamp. I think that would make excellent land for flax-growing. The idea was to turn it into grass, which I think would be folly.

63. You think, under certain conditions, the raw material might be profitably cultivated here?—Yes.

64. *Mr. Hogg.*] Do I understand you to say, Mr. Gardner, there are a good many qualities of rope and twine that cannot be profitably produced from New Zealand flax?—I think, from what we know of our present dressed flax, it does not stand water as well as the manila. It is a very good substitute for the higher class, as flannelette is a substitute for flannel. It puts it within the reach of people who cannot afford a better article.

65. Do you think if the tariff was altered it would lead to the increased manufacture of the New Zealand product in the colony?—No.

66. Do you think it would diminish the importation of manila?—No, I do not think so.

67. *The Chairman.*] Are you satisfied with the information you get about the Home markets in connection with the price of flax?—We are getting too little. We want more information.

68. Have you any suggestions to give the Committee in the way of facilitating your being acquainted with the Home markets? Would it assist the trade if the price of flax were more frequently supplied?—I have been trying to get the Agent-General to send us cables through once a fortnight. We get them so irregularly that it is oftentimes a month or six weeks before we know anything about the Home market.

69. That would be good for the trade. You mentioned Canada as a probable field?—It is a large grain-growing country, and the binder-twine there used is very considerable. It is mostly manila or sisal that is used. I am not aware New Zealand has any hold in the market.

70. How do Donaghy and Co. get their flax? Do they buy it in the market?—Yes.

71. Can you tell me for how long Donaghy and Co. have had almost a monopoly—for how many years?—I could not say.

72. Will it be three or four years?—I think they have had almost a monopoly for the last six years. They bought out the Auckland Company, then the Southland Company.

73. During the last three or four years do you know if there has been any great increase in the production of binder-twine, or any great increase in the production of anything in New Zealand from flax?—No, I cannot say.

74. You do not know whether the reduction in the amount of flax exported is due to a reduction in the amount of the raw material manufactured, or an increase in the manufacture of twine and rope from raw material?—No.

75. One witness stated to the Committee that there was a prospect for New Zealand flax. Do you think there is anything higher for the New Zealand article?—I think we can improve the quality of the flax. Flax is injured very much by the present way of dressing it. If we could meet that. I think the injury takes place, first, in the way of dressing, and then, again, in the paddocks; there it is exposed to the weather so long that it is injured both in strength and colour. There is a Mr. Ross, in Invercargill, treating it with chemicals without exposure to the air.

76. What are the new lines Mr. Ross is going on?—He uses chloride of lime. We do not think it will affect the strength.

77. *Mr. Buchanan.*] That would not injure the strength?—It is a common method used by other mills.