

78. *Mr. Hogg.*] A great deal can be done through the chemical treatment of various fibres?—Take China grass, chemicals being introduced have made a fibre as fine and as glossy as silk. It was a most difficult thing to treat the China grass before. I do not think we will ever much improve the mechanical dressing of flax. Those are the lines we are on now.

Mr. R. MEREDITH, M.H.R., examined.

79. *The Chairman.*] You desire to make a statement to the Committee, Mr. Meredith?—I have been engaged in practical farming for about fourteen years, and I have used various descriptions of twine, imported and locally made, for binder-machine purposes. When I first commenced farming with the McCormack machine, I used American imported twine, and paid from 1s. to 1s. 4d. a pound for it. This was hemp-twine. Since then, I have used various twines.

80. *Mr. McLean.*] What do you mean by hemp?—Russian hemp. Since then, I have used locally made twine. When first manufactured, the locally made twine was not equal to the imported article in quality, and was much dearer; but, I considered it my duty to encourage the local industry. During the past five years I have not used any of the imported twine. I have used the Auckland-made twine, the Dunedin-made twine, and during the last season I have used locally made twine. When I say locally made twine, I mean made in Canterbury. The Auckland twine is made largely of flax with a little admixture of manila. I find that the twine made from New Zealand flax, without any admixture of foreign fibre, with the application of a little linseed-oil in the manufacture of the twine, to work well, and has given me great satisfaction. I have been able to purchase this twine made from New Zealand flax, pure and simple, at 4½d. per pound. I find it to be much cheaper than the imported article, and works well in the McCormack binder. My neighbours have also been using in various harvesters the same description of twine, and, so far as I have been informed, it appears to give general satisfaction. I have used during the past few years tons of this twine made from New Zealand flax, and I consider that, with the improved machinery now imported, locally made twine from New Zealand flax will absolutely shut out the imported article and become an established industry in the colony.

81. *Mr. Symes.*] I would like to ask Mr. Meredith whether a “corner” which is made in New Zealand twine would be the means of shutting it out to a great extent? Some merchants, I understand, had bought up the right pretty well of all the New Zealand flax-twine, and people could buy it in Australia and bring it back here cheaper than buying it at first in the colony?—That was so, I believe, a few years ago; but that monopoly is now broken down. I might be permitted to point out that, with a view of assisting to break up that monopoly, the Farmers’ Co-operative Association in Canterbury—a very powerful organization—has imported machinery of the latest invention, and established works for binder-twine manufacture at Waikuku, about twenty miles north from Christchurch.

82. I have had a great deal of experience in the working of binder-twine. I was cropping about fifteen years, and had various kinds of reapers-and-binders. Did you ever find in your experience, Mr. Meredith, that the difficulty originally with the New Zealand twine was with the knotter-and-cutter: it was too hard for the knotter-and-cutter, and often, instead of tying a sheaf, only partly cut the string at the knot?—I experienced a little of that in the early stages of the manufacture of the New Zealand twine. I found it uneven, and it was in the habit of unfolding; but during the last two or three years the twine has been made much more even, and with the application of a little linseed-oil, that has given it a sort of glazed surface, it works remarkably well.

83. Another thing, we found it was heavier, and, of course, much shorter than the balls of Russian hemp. I have used Howard’s Simplex, the Deering, and the McCormack binders, and with the different machines the difficulty is to use these twines. With a Howard’s Simplex we never use New Zealand twine at all; the McCormack was better, and the Deering still better. I have also used a Massey-Harris, and have seen a great deal of this machine from working it; so I am perfectly satisfied if the New Zealand hemp or New Zealand twine is made as Mr. Meredith says, it must, from its very cheapness, break down the importation of the other, because the cheapest I ever got any of the other was at 10½d. per pound.—it is far cheaper than that now. For a number of years it was 10d. I have bought in the latter years Russian hemp as low as 7d., and the other 4d. to 5d.

84. *Mr. Wason.*] With regard to the cultivation of flax in Waikuku, do you think there is enough to keep mills going for any time?—To supply the flax to the Waikuku Mill they have sometimes to go a distance of between eighty and one hundred miles. I understand flax at the present time is being cut and conveyed by rail from Springfield to Kaiapoi, thence to Waikuku by wagon.

85. *Mr. McLean.*] What did they put the mill there for?—To use up the flax in the immediate neighbourhood.

86. *Mr. Wason.*] It has been said in evidence here that you could cut the flax every third year?—I believe that can be done only on first-class land.

87. You do not know of it in your own district?—No; we cut only every fourth year on our own land.

88. From what you know of flax, do you imagine it would be a profitable thing to cultivate? Is it an industry that is going to be here for all time; or is it only a temporary crop that is simply to be cut down, and then farming will take its place; or is it a crop you would always be able to cultivate?—In consequence of the low prices now obtained, for several years farmers have destroyed a great deal of flax and grown other crops.

89. Do you think it is possible to grow flax at the same time that you are stocking your land? Do you not think you would have to shut your land up?—You could grow flax without any injury to the flax with sheep, but not with cattle. You can graze sheep without any detriment to flax on