

One of the Bristol manufacturers informed me that New Zealand hemp is now being increasingly used in competition with manila, sisal, and Mauritius hems. He thought the trade might be increased, especially if the fibre is well and honestly prepared, and shipped in a sound condition, free from extraneous matter. In nearly every bale he finds a quantity of dust like sawdust; others contain lumps of wood, and an excessive quantity of wire and iron hoops inside the wrapping, which all tends to make the cost of the fibre higher. If care were taken by exporters to minimise these defects, good shipper's marks would soon gain a reputation and command a better price. In strength New Zealand hemp is not quite equal to manila; but he thinks that, with greater care in the growth and in the subsequent preparation of the fibre prior to export, the strength could be brought up to manila.

Liverpool dealers in New Zealand hemp, who distribute it all over the United Kingdom, said that the fibre arrives in good condition, but they would prefer to have it of higher quality. They get no direct shipments to Liverpool; they buy through London. All the New Zealand hemp, so far as they are aware, is used for ropemaking; but some New Zealand "slivers" are utilised for mixing with other goods. Manila hemp holds the premier position. New Zealand does not compete with it in the meantime; but if the phormium fibre were improved it would be able to take the place of manila. The price of New Zealand hemp at the present time (May) is equal to that of the lower qualities of manila, and the demand is increasing.

The principal of a firm of hemp-dealers in Manchester said there was not a large demand for the New Zealand fibre in that city. Liverpool and the east-coast ports are large consumers, but draw their supplies from London, where the hemp is handled by brokers. At present Manchester is not a good distributing centre for hemp; but if the Ship Canal Company could fix up low through rates of carriage to the consuming centres there might be a large business done. Hitherto, it had cost his firm more to import direct to Manchester than to obtain the hemp from London. There is, under existing conditions, too much of a "gamble" about dealing in New Zealand hemp, as well as in manila and sisal. That is because of the method of selling; the producers ought to send it on consignment. He found the system of Government grading in New Zealand most satisfactory.

The chief partner in a London firm upon whom I called said he was not disposed to commence making direct purchases of New Zealand hemp in the colony; he could buy better on Mincing Lane. New Zealand hemp is an excellent article, but it does not stand tear and wear so well as manila, and is more readily injured by wet.

The managing director of a large concern in Glasgow said that New Zealand hemp is sent out in a fairly satisfactory condition, and he anticipates that the new system of grading will be the means of improving it. Even as it is, the grading is much in advance of other classes of fibres. His company utilises New Zealand tow in the making of cheap cords, but does not use it or hemp for any other purpose than cordage-manufacture. The principal fibres competing with New Zealand hemp are manila, also sisals from various countries. For shipping purposes, which is the principal source of demand for hemp in Scotland, manila is much in advance of New Zealand hemp, owing to its standing wet much better. Any increase in the consumption of New Zealand hemp could only be brought about by prices being considerably under those of manila. He considered the direct steam service from New Zealand fairly satisfactory. His chief complaint was the irregularity of the running. Sometimes a steamer arrives within seven or eight weeks after sailing from New Zealand; but at other times, through calling at different ports, it may take three or four months. This throws them out very much in their calculations as to deliveries.

In Dundee, where there is a large market for hemp, for ropemaking and other purposes, I was informed that no New Zealand hemp is used for fine cordage, but there is a considerable quantity used in the making of heavy ropes. The New Zealand fibre is generally bought in London through brokers, and the firms using it think that this is the best way of dealing with it, and that there would be no advantage in direct relations with the exporters. Generally speaking, Italian hemp is what is required in Dundee, and other kinds are only used when the Italian is scarce or the price prohibitive.

When in Liverpool a second time, on the 20th September, I visited the Tropical Products Exhibition, held in the Old Cotton Exchange. In this there was a large exhibit of manila, sisal, ramie, and a number of other fibres. New Zealand hemp did not figure among them, as it is not at present grown in any tropical country; but the exhibit impressed one with the importance of having the New Zealand product shown whenever and wherever possible. In this connection, I was pleased to observe some very fine samples of hemp and tow shown, with other produce, in the New Zealand Court at the Dublin International Exhibition.

2. TIMBER.

The export trade in New Zealand timber is capable of great extension, if proper attention is paid to it. Glasgow, Liverpool, and Manchester are all large consumers of timbers like kauri and white-pine; while Bristol, if cultivated, might develop a considerable business in the finer woods suitable for cabinetmaking. Cardiff, which is the largest timber-importing port in the United Kingdom, takes none from New Zealand at present—her requirements being chiefly the cheaper kinds of wood, for use as pit-props, &c., which she can obtain more cheaply from European countries. The timber in which a great development of trade may be expected is white-pine, which is in growing demand on account of the shortage of Canadian. From statistics recently issued by the secretary of the Northern Pine Manufacturers' Association, a decrease in the production of Canadian white-pine to the extent of 240,000,000 ft. is reported for this year, as compared with last. The stock in hand on the 1st August, 1907, was 822,317,578 ft., as against 966,079,774 ft. at the same time last year. This shortage creates a great opportunity for extending the English