

QUALITY OF FIBRE.

The quality of the hemp during the past year, as can be seen from the attached tables, shows an all-round improvement at all the grading-ports as compared with the previous year. The percentage of good-fair is increased by 9 per cent., and low-fair and common also show a moderate improvement. This without doubt is due principally to a difference of £3 to £5 per ton ruling during a great part of the year between the different grades, and it is to be hoped that this difference will continue, as the majority of millers will do their utmost to mill for the higher grades.

Most of the low-fair and common hemp graded at the ports of Foxton and Wellington was due solely to the very inferior (diseased) leaf several millers had to contend with, and very short leaf in the Southland District was responsible for the high percentage of low-fair graded at the Bluff. In many cases, however, the hemp graded during the year would have pointed much higher but for the unsatisfactory work in scutching. This branch of milling is invariably done under the contract system, and the tendency is to aim at quantity and not quality. One result of poor scutching (with the resultant bad tail on the hanks), is that cordage-manufacturers experience great trouble in spinning, and oversea buyers often complain strongly of this weakness in our fibre, which must have a detrimental effect on its sale. This fault has to be recognized in grading, and many large parcels dealt with during the year had in consequence to be put into a lower grade than that which the quality of the body of the fibre merited.

I would especially impress upon millers that something must be done to uplift the industry by improving the methods followed in the production of phormium-fibre, more especially in the scutching process. In so doing a regular quality of fibre would be produced, which would be appreciated by users and lead to an expansion of the demand. There is not the slightest doubt that in consequence of the large quantities of sisal now produced, and the improved methods of producing this fibre, phormium-fibre is likely to suffer in the world's markets unless something is done to materially improve on its present average quality. The loss to the Dominion on the past year's output caused by the production of low-grade fibre which would have easily secured a higher grade by extra scutching is estimated at between £10,000 and £12,000, this calculation being based on the difference of prices between the various grades. Not only is there a direct loss in the output of a low-grade article, but an indirect one caused by the prejudice created in the minds of manufacturers, who, perhaps being unaware of our better quality, discard phormium under the impression that they have seen our best.

The quality of the tow produced in the past season must be regarded as very satisfactory, the percentage of third grade for the Dominion being only 7.5 per cent., compared with 18 per cent. in the previous year. First grade has also gone up from 30 to 35 per cent.

The low prices offering and very small demand for stripper-slips were responsible for the large decrease in this by-product.

The Marlborough, West Coast (South Island), and Wairoa districts still uphold their reputation for turning out a first-class quality of fibre, and millers in these districts have no trouble in disposing of most of their output to local manufacturers. There are also several millers in the Wairarapa and Manawatu districts who deserve special mention.

MANUFACTURING PROCESSES.

A sulphur-bleaching process has been carried out by a few millers, but so far has not been as successful as was anticipated.

GRADING STATISTICS.

The following tables give particulars of the grading during the year ended 31st March, 1920, the Dominion totals and percentages for the previous year being also shown for comparison in the first three tables:—

Hemp (Bales).

Grading-ports.			Superfine.	Fine.	Good-fair.	High-fair.	Low-Fair.	Common.	Rejected	Con-demned.	Total.
Auckland	..	..	..	46	3,488	10,493	4,991	551	14	..	19,383
Foxton	..	..	..	14	2,250	14,964	5,480	491	212	..	23,411
Wellington	..	..	..	92	6,184	19,352	9,658	579	94	..	35,959
Bluff	..	..	..	..	305	2,650	2,625	301	13	..	5,894
Dunedin	..	..	..	..	315	752	535	116	..	..	1,718
Blenheim	..	..	..	4	1,136	40	13	19	3	..	1,215
Picton	..	..	..	394	264	14	..	..	..	..	872
Napier	..	..	..	..	2,108	..	..	..	..	..	2,108
Lyttelton	..	..	..	50	178	80	..	..	..	..	308
Totals, 1919-20	..	..	..	800	16,228	48,345	23,102	2,057	336	..	99,868
Percentage	..	..	..	0.88	17.82	53.23	25.43	2.26	0.37	..	..
Totals, 1918-19	..	..	..	571	12,150	72,970	44,105	6,276	596	105	136,773
Percentage	..	..	..	0.41	8.92	53.32	32.23	4.61	0.43	0.08	..

Total decrease in 1919-20, 45,905 bales.