

falsified. There are also the thoroughly crochetty, who cannot hear their notions gainsayed without a desperate struggle. There is the half-thinking multitude, whose reasoning has no further foundation than street-corner confab; and the extremely cautious man (shall I say merchant) who must feel the shilling come into the empty hand before he lets the sixpenny-piece out of the other. Yet, thanks to the manufacturer of the great human time-piece, we have also the practical, persevering character; for although science and theory have told wonderfully in advancing mankind, yet practice is the main-spring that takes the machine along.

I fear I may have trespassed too much on your columns, and tried the patience of your readers; as for myself, I feel the subject to be of such importance to the welfare of this country, that I could go on scribbling almost *ad infinitum*. One comfort in the matter is that there is more than enough for all who are here at present, and therefore there need be no need of quarrelling in any shape; but, on the contrary, I think it is highly desirable to form, in each centre of population, associations of flax-dressers for mutual instruction, and generally to forward and protect this new branch of industry. There are many points on which such combinations would prove essentially useful. It could (if need be) then aid in getting the products conveyed to market, &c.

I am, &c.,

R. D. BUST.

29th June, 1869.

No. X.

THE PREPARATION OF NEW ZEALAND FLAX.

[Written for the *Press*.]

Now that the flax manufacturers in New Zealand have been forced to recognize the very unpleasant fact that the fibre of the *Phormium tenax* or New Zealand flax, as at present dressed, has been found, from actual experiment, totally unfitted to compete with Manilla hemp in the manufacture of the superior qualities of rope; and that there are even grave doubts that it will be able to maintain a tolerable position alongside of the lower-priced fibres, such as jute, Bombay hemp, &c., &c., which are used in the manufacture of inferior cordage, it behoves all persons interested in maintaining our fibre in the position of an article of profitable export to look the causes of this discouraging failure fully in the face, and by all means in their power endeavour to rectify the errors that have been made. And, after all, to what may our late failure be attributed? Why, to nothing more than sending home the fibre in too humble a guise. We, having a really valuable fibre that, when properly prepared, has been proved to be fitted for the manufacture of textile fabrics of the highest grade, have been content to use only the most preliminary process to disintegrate it; and, having stopped there, have placed the partially-cleaned fibre in the market, where, as might have been expected, it has only taken rank along with the inferior fibres, instead of being placed side by side with the *Linum usitatissimum* or Irish flax, where it certainly would have been, had more attention been paid by our manufacturers to the production of quality in the place of quantity. *Hinc illæ lachrymæ.*

As a matter of course, it is very galling to discover that the gradual, though rapid, rise that took place in the price paid for our flax fibre in the home market, which we fondly attributed to the increasing appreciation of its superior qualities, was after all only due to a little "log-rolling" on the part of the trade, to bring down the price of the more coveted article Manilla, and that our fibre has been used merely as a catspaw to effect that object. It would be well, however, if the evil stopped at that; but not being behind the scenes, our manufacturers here only observed that large quantities of their fibre were being absorbed by the trade at home, and naturally looking upon the transaction as a *bona fide* one, it has acted as a stimulus to them to incur fresh expenses, by entering more extensively into the production of quantity (but I am sorry to say with scarcely any endeavours to improve or alter the quality—the one thing needful), persons not already in the trade have been induced, by the apparently large profits that were being made, to embark their capital in flax mills; add to this that the bulk of the fibre exported will have to face not only a largely overstocked market, but also a depreciated character, and I think the difficulties of our position may be realized. If it is any consolation to know that ours is not an isolated case, and that we do not stand alone in the position of having in our possession a most valuable article of export, which up to the present time we have failed to put upon the market in its most remunerative form, we need only look to India, which for the last fifty years has known herself to count among her treasures a plant that produces one of the most valuable fibres known. This plant can be grown through an unlimited extent of country cheaply and easily; yet hitherto she has not been able to obtain the necessary requirements for producing this fibre in its most valuable condition at anything approaching a paying price. However, nothing daunted, the Government of India has now offered two rewards, one of £5,000, the other of £2,000, subject of course to certain conditions, by which means they hope, not without reason, to accomplish their object. The fibre of this plant, namely, the Ramie or Rhea, commonly called China grass (*Urtica tenacissima*), is described as being made into fabrics of so strong and so lustrous a character as to be in universal demand in the home market, where the fibre has already obtained the high price of two shillings and fourpence per pound. It would be well if the Government of New Zealand would endeavour to emulate the liberality of the Indian Government, and follow the example of her policy, of developing the resources of the country; we too might then hope that before very long all our present difficulties would be swept away, and we should see our fibre, properly cleaned and prepared, taking a very high position among the textiles used for spinning purposes, and returning to its producers a large share of profit, instead of, as at present, ranking only on a par with inferior fibres, and making very small, if any, returns for the labour expended upon it.

As there is no doubt that the fibre of our *Phormium tenax*, when properly cleaned and deprived of all extraneous matter, is capable of being worked up into the finest of textile fabrics—(instead of saying