

those who speak only by report, or after a single ineffectual trial,) think that the colonists may calculate on a large sale at from £30 to £35; but it must be free from straw. The longer the flax is, the better. The hanks or "strikes" in each bale should be all of the same length, and the bale marked accordingly.

Attention to such matters greatly facilitates the sale, especially as regards an article against which a prejudice has been created by large shipments of an inferior sort.

The cost of New Zealand flax places it entirely beyond the reach of paper makers, who to a large extent depend on the refuse of other trades. Esparto grass from Spain, which, although scarce, can be bought here at £8 a ton, is now most extensively used in the manufacture of newspaper and book papers; and although New Zealand flax would be useful for giving it strength as a better class paper, and for producing good papers by itself, yet the price would be such as could never pay the colonists to export. There is a wood pulp imported from Germany, and New Zealand flax or tow might probably pay if reduced to pulp and shipped in blocks at a low freight. Blocks of any size would suit, but they must be pressed free from water, and unbleached. It is difficult to get makers to commit themselves to anticipatory prices, but £18 to £20 is a probable figure. Doubts are however suggested as to the pulp keeping during so long a voyage, and we were advised to recommend that, before shipping to the Home market, parcels should be first sent for experiment to the paper mills at Melbourne.

At Manchester we were glad to learn from a very large house that New Zealand flax was being used by several spinners, but on visiting them we found that they one and all declared its inapplicability in its present state for manufacturing purposes. Here, as at Leeds, Dundee, and other places, every manufacturer we called on knew something of the article, and many had tried it and found it unsuitable for their purpose. They treated the term "flax" as a misnomer, and declared that, so long as it retained its harsh nature and inability to split, it was not adapted for spinning purposes. At Kirkcaldy, Messrs. Lockhart very kindly put a strike through their machinery to convince us of its want of adaptation for spinning, even as a substitute for low-priced jute bagging; and everywhere else we were told, that all the while the fibre broke short off like a stick, as it does as at present prepared, it would prove unfit for their use. We invariably narrated the advice which had been given to the colonists, to ship their flax in a rough state, trusting to British competition and science for bringing it into consumption; and were as invariably assured that the fibre must be softened and cleansed from scurf during its colonial stage, numerous experiments having shown it to be too late to do so after it had reached England.

We should have been considerably disappointed with the immediate future of New Zealand flax if we had only taken with us samples of that prepared by the colonists. We should have had to report that its use was likely to be for some time confined only to rope. But we had fortunately a small sample of flax dressed by the Natives. It was by no means a superior sample, very scurfy and far less silky than much we have seen in the Colony. Every manufacturer seemed struck with it. It completely answered all the objections they had raised to the ordinary samples we had previously shown them. There was but little harshness in it; it was almost as soft as they could wish; and the fibre broke feathery instead of square. They doubted its being the same material, and on our explaining the cause of the difference—that the European dressed the whole leaf, while the Native only dressed one side of it—they expressed their conviction that a market was open for any quantity, at a comparatively high rate. In Lancashire and Yorkshire they did not hesitate to say £60. In Dundee the largest canvas manufacturers named £50, and none, however cautiously inclined, fixed a lower value than £40 a ton. In one word, while the ordinary New Zealand flax was considered useful only for rope, the Native dressed was declared a very acceptable addition by cotton, woollen, jute, and canvas manufacturers, without a single exception. These all however insisted, as the ropemakers did with respect to the ordinary kind, that freedom from scurf was an absolute necessity.

The discrepancy between the uses formerly ascribed to New Zealand flax and that to which the supply now in the market is put is thus explained, the reports of former years being founded on the export, which then wholly consisted of Native-dressed. Upon the latter kind, several of the manufacturers have promised to experiment, if we can supply them with a few cwts.; but at present, although I have searched the London sale-rooms, I cannot find any.

Our attention was frequently drawn to the probable improvement which cultivation would produce, and to the necessity for careful and varied experiments being undertaken in the Colony as to the age at which the leaf matures. The present practice of cutting leaves of all ages indiscriminately, passing them through the mill together, and packing them in the same bale, is a great mistake, the fibres varying in strength at different ages, as is evident to any one who will take the trouble to test them individually in a hank so prepared. Manilla takes three years to come to perfection; and we are told that some hemp lately imported, and made from one year old leaves, was found to be almost useless.

From the foregoing, you will no doubt draw the conclusion that there is no reason for the colonists to be discouraged with New Zealand flax as a profitable article of export. It has at present to contend against a prejudice arising from inferior shipments in the first place, and kept up by the large quantity of the same character still arriving; but if care is taken to prepare only a bright well-cleaned article, it will work into a large and steady consumption, at remunerative rates. Still further, if the colonists will prepare it equal to that dressed by the Natives, there is scarcely any limit to the trade they can establish.

I have, &c.,
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Secretary.

The Hon. the Home Commissioners for New Zealand.