

Wet stripping.

without involving a great loss in the form of tow. There are some other minor improvements that also deserve notice, as they will no doubt come into general use; such as directing a flow of water over the fibre as it passes through the stripping machines, and, when water power is abundant, passing the fibre through a second machine, set somewhat differently, immediately after it leaves the first; an improvement which is in use by Messrs. Stonyer and Co., of Kaiapoi. It should be mentioned that the use of water in the stripping machines not only improves the appearance of the fibre, but also reduces the friction of the machinery, causing it to wear better, and economising the driving power. In some mills, also, a travelling web or table removes the bruised leaf as it is run from the machines, by which a saving of labour is effected. The only improved stripping machine which has been brought under the notice of the Commissioners, is that of Mr. White, of Auckland; and, judging from the samples of fibre prepared by it, which have been submitted, it deserves the attention of manufacturers, as it appears to clean the fibre without bruising or cutting it in the manner which is so frequently observed in the ordinary machine dressed fibre (App. p. 77), its action appearing to produce a result on the leaf more analagous to the scraping process of the Natives.

Northern District.

In Auckland, as in other parts of the Colony, a large number of the mills that were started a couple of years ago have been closed. In the Mauku and Waiuku districts, those that continued running were all worked by water power, as the extra expense of steam would have swallowed up the little profits that were still attainable.

Importance of neat baling.

Price's and Gibbons' machines, with an improvement on the former by Dugald, were chiefly used, but there was a difference of opinion as to their respective merits. The plant is not abundant in this district, and the cost of the green leaf is correspondingly high; but there is sufficient for these small mill owners, who, working themselves, and with their families, and sparing no pains to produce a good article (for none other will sell at a remunerative price), can earn fair wages. Their fibre meets with a ready sale in Auckland to the rope spinners, or for export to Sydney, where a good deal is made use of, as much as £13,000 having been paid within the last three years by one firm for New Zealand fibre, —from £17 to £21 a ton being the prices given for favourite brands. Murray's brand is considered one of the best, and fetches the highest rate; it is not only carefully prepared, but is also very neatly baled, as is the greater part of the Auckland fibre; and there is no doubt that this is one of the advantages that the Northern fibre has over that of the other Island in the home market. Thompson Bros., and Keleher's are also favourites for the Sydney market. Mr. Dugald has a good mill nearer the Waikato, and also makes a first-class fibre, which he states only costs him £14 10s. at his mill, though he pays as much as 16s. a ton for his green leaf; but wages are low in this district, as men can be got for £1 a week, finding their own food.

It is encouraging to have to report that at the present time (September, '71) the best brands find a ready sale in Auckland, for the local supply and for the neighbouring Colonies, and the favourite manufacturers cannot produce fibre fast enough to meet the demand.

Central District.

The only mill at work in the vicinity of Napier was that of Messrs. Nelson Bros. Steam power is used, and two of Price's machines were at work, a stream of water from artesian wells being kept running over the flax as it is passed through. It is then squeezed through rollers, and washed and dried in the usual manner; the leaves are carefully sorted into three lengths, and the cost of a ton of ordinary fibre is about £15, exclusive of interest and management. About three tons have been further hackled, to test its value in the London market, but as twelve tons of leaf will only make one of hackled fibre, and one of tow, at an expense of £35, it is hardly to be expected that the sale will be remunerative. Messrs. Nelson have sent a bale of this fibre for the Exhibition, and also a very interesting series of specimens showing the fibre in the different stages of manufacture at the mill (Cl. A. II a. Nos. 55-8, App. p. 42).

Cost of hackling.

The cutting of the green leaf has been systematically conducted by Messrs. Nelson, and the subsequent growth of the plant carefully noted. The results