

of the observations, which are of much interest, will be found in the Appendix (p. 63.).

The only mills in operation on the West Coast of the Province of Wellington were working on a small scale, steam being the usual motive power, as there is rarely a sufficient supply of water for the purpose of driving machinery in the vicinity of the raw material. In many cases the supply is even so short that there is not enough to allow of the fibre being thoroughly washed, which is a serious disadvantage to the manufacturer. Price's stripping machines are the most general in use, and are universally preferred in this district, as they are said to dress the fibre more evenly, although Gibbons' machine causes less waste. Wet-scutching is employed only in one mill—Mr. Musson's—owing to the deficient supply of water. At this mill, also, there being no screw press, a beam of wood thirty-six feet long, is used for baling, a contrivance which is in common use in North America for compressing fur-bales, and might be usefully employed by small capitalists. Mr. Scrivener's is the best in this district, and took the first prize at the Wanganui Show. The superiority must be attributed solely to the extreme care which he takes in cutting the green leaf clear of the butts. Half a ton of this flax has been sent to England by the Commissioners for experiment, and one bale placed in the Exhibition. He uses horse-power to drive his stripping machine, and as most of the work is done by the family, and a good price is obtained for all the produce, the business, though on a small scale, is profitable. The horses are fed chiefly on the strippings from the green leaf, of which they are very fond. Messrs. Rees and Richardson, of Rangitikei, have displayed much enterprise and skill in various experiments, which, however, are not yet perfected. They find that the use of boiling water to clean the fibre, immediately after stripping, removes the red tinge from the butts, with no other advantage. They have also tried steaming and rolling, with a pressure up to 3 tons, but have not yet produced a sufficient quantity to test the market.

Beam press.

Horses fed on mill waste.

At Opunake, 50 miles from New Plymouth, two companies have commenced operations under very favourable circumstances. As companies, they had sufficient capital for plant and preliminary expenses. They lease extensive areas, covered with wild *Phormium* plants, from the Natives, and have an abundance of water for power and washing, while the raw material being at hand, there is no expense for land carriage, and labour is procurable at moderate rates. If, therefore, the manufacture of the fibre is to pay in any part of the Colony, it should do so here.

Price's stripping machines were the favourites here also, though considered capable of improvement, and the after washing of the fibre was attended to with especial care at the works of the Cape Egmont Company, which are a model of economical management; but neither the scutching nor selection of leaves were sufficiently thorough to enable a first-class sample to be produced.

Attention is especially directed to a small caterpillar, which has made its appearance in several districts, and has very largely injured the leaves of the plants in this neighbourhood. It is to be feared that if it continues to increase, its ravages will be seriously felt. It attacks the leaves in the early summer, and eats away the fibre in long patches, which leads to an extra quantity of tow being scutched out during the manufacture.

Ravages of a caterpillar.

There are several mills in the Wairau Valley, though at the time it was visited, only one was at work. Price's, Anderson's, and Mills' machines have been tried; Mr. Seymour much prefers the first, but Anderson's were used by Messrs. Hathaway & Howland; they, however, do not clean the fibre as well as Price's, nor can so much leaf be put through them in a given time.

There is abundance of raw material and water in this district, but the manufacture has not been in all cases profitable. It has cost one mill owner £20, a ton to produce 80 tons, including interest on capital; and as the fibre was not well washed, it would not rank above the 2nd class.

The fibre prepared in the Wairau District by Messrs. Logan and Sinclair, and by Mr. Goulter, deserves special mention, as having probably commanded the highest prices of any that has been placed in the London market. By both,