

able industry in these; but the fish itself is made little or no use of, owing to the want of knowledge of how to prepare them for any market, although there are several ways of preparing them, and several markets open. If this could be thoroughly ascertained, I have no doubt additional encouragement would be given to the enterprise. *Crayfish* are also very abundant in the West Coast sounds. There are various ways of preparing them for the Chinese market. I have seen the Chinese drying them in the sun and on ovens, after parboiling and taking the fish out of the shell, and cutting it up into small pieces.

*Timber.*—This trade has fallen off very much of late here, no doubt owing to the general depression of trade, but partly owing to the cost of getting the timber to a port of shipment. I think a special tariff would give a great stimulus to this important industry. A small reduction would sometimes allow a trade to be carried on when otherwise it has to be abandoned.

*Native Flax.*—This product is growing in abundance everywhere, but, from the absence of any effective means of preparing it for the market, a remunerative price cannot be obtained for it. Much time and money have been expended in endeavouring to discover some effective and economical means of preparing it, but without success. The beneficial results of such a discovery would be so great that I think the Government would be justified in offering a substantial reward for such discovery. While on this subject I may mention that some years ago, when the flax-dressing was taken up with vigour, I designed a current-wheel to utilize the power of the rapid rivers on which much of the flax grows. Such rivers as the Waiau and the Molyneux I look upon as immense power running to waste for want of convenient and effective means of utilizing their force. This wheel is admitted by experts to thoroughly overcome the "backwash," which, with ordinary wheels, destroys two-thirds of the power of the current. It also provides for the rising and falling of the river, so common in this colony. It would be a very cheap motor, and could be applied to many uses, such as raising water for irrigation, driving flax-mills, agricultural machinery, and, with wire-ropes, could be carried to considerable distances over the country. I published a description for the benefit of any who might give it a trial, but I am not aware that any one has done so. As a rule, people are very slow to see the advantage of anything new.

*Patent Laws.*—It must be well known that the patent laws of America have given immense stimulus to invention, and that the nation has profited by it; and it must also be well known that those of Britain and her colonies have had the very opposite effect. I therefore think that the present law should be entirely repealed, and a simple and cheap means devised for making an invention the property of the inventor. It is a fallacy to suppose an inventor can impose on the public; because the public will not use a bad invention, nor are they obliged to use a good one, nor to give more than its value if they do. This is, unfortunately, too well known to those who have had experience in bringing out new inventions. Even when successful, large amounts of money have to be expended before any returns come in; and in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred they come to nothing, or remain so long unappreciated that they are no benefit to the original inventor. This has been the case with many of our best inventions. I therefore see no reason why a tax should be put upon them in the first instance. If a tax is desirable at all, let it be imposed when the inventor comes to make a profit by it. I think that a simple *Gazette* notice, giving a clear description of the invention, should be all that is required, the Government stamping one, to be held by the inventor as his title. If any one can produce a prior notice, of course the second would be void, and the inventor would have to put up with the disappointment. Were this the case, an inventor would take care not to expend money on his invention before he ascertained whether he was the first or not. I see no reason why the Government should know anything about the merits of the invention; the public will soon find them out before adopting it. What brought this view of letters patent to my notice was, that I have now in my possession three British patents and one colonial one; also newspaper notices of inventions which I did not patent: and these notices are of as much use to me in proving that I am the first inventor as the elaborate documents of letters patent; and the common law would be able to decide as easily from the evidence of the one as the other. I think the subject can be reduced to great simplicity without injury to any interests. It has been said that the manufacturers cannot improve their machinery without being liable to having some one, unknown to them, taking out a patent for the improvement, and coming on them for infringement. If they had only to give notice of the improvement, as I suggest, they could do so without trouble, such as going through the ordeal of taking out a patent. I have now, besides those patents, some seven inventions, all of which I have reason to believe are new and useful. I might give them to the public; but the result would likely be that the public would not get the benefit, as some more wealthy person in a position to push them may take out a patent for them.

Trusting you will excuse this from an unsuccessful patentee (so far as the returns are concerned),

I have, &c.,

THOMAS THOMSON.

No. 98.

Mr. CHARLES TRAILL to the Chairman of the Royal Commission on Local Industries.

SIR,—

Stewart Island, 30th April, 1880.

After despatching the note which I had the honor to address to you on the 1st instant, I wrote to procure, if possible, some useful information from those most largely engaged here in saw-milling and fishing. I have, however, failed to elicit any information or suggestions of any value. With regard to the fishing and oystering industries here, the chief reason probably that they do not flourish more is, that there is but a limited demand either for fish or oysters. An idea seems prevalent that these industries have derived little or no benefit from the Middle Island railways owing to the high rates charged, and that if the carriage by rail were reduced, so that fresh fish and oysters could be conveyed quickly and cheaply to the various centres of population, the consumption and demand would greatly increase, especially if the "empties" were returned at a mere nominal cost or free of charge. The other Stewart Island industries, as I mentioned in my former letter, are saw-milling, sealing, mutton-birding, and halibut-fishing, known as paua-ing ("paua" being the native