

## MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

## FLAX.

MONDAY, 28TH JULY, 1890. (Mr. HAMLIN, Chairman.)

CHARLES CHINNERY, of Rangiora, Flax-dresser, examined.

1. *The Chairman.*] The Committee are informed, Mr. Chinnery, that you are likely to throw considerable light upon the flax question : will you state what your experience has been?—I have had twenty-five years' experience in flax now, and I have worked it all the way through. I have never stopped flax-dressing for the last twenty-five years. I started in a very small way, and worked on steadily until I got into a very large way of business in the flax trade. As to machinery, I find the machinery we have now is equal to what we want for the fibre at the present time. Ordinary machines will dress that quality of fibre for coarse use [pointing to some flax on the table]. I have supplied large firms with fibre for twenty years, and I have made fibre of different descriptions. We do not make our ordinary bales as good as the sample produced; our customers do not want it as good.

2. *Mr. Valentine.*] This is specially prepared then?—It is not specially prepared. I make a certain amount of that quality for show and experimental purposes.

3. *Mr. Wilson.*] It is not a sample of your ordinary work?—No; it is too good; they do not want it as good as that. It would cost about £3 a ton more than ordinary stuff.

4. *Mr. Mackenzie.*] Could you get £3 extra on the cost when selling it?—It is this way, sir: I dressed a bale like that at £30 for the show at Christchurch, and Mr. Donaghy came down there and asked me if I would make up samples for the Dunedin Exhibition, and I told him, as he is a large customer of mine, he could take it for that, but if he gave me any orders it would be £5 per ton more. When they got it they said it was splendid fibre, equal to manila, but they did not want it as good as that, although they allowed it was equal to manila, or better.

5. *Major Steward.*] You said your clients did not want it so good?—It is too good to mix with manila, and if used as substitute for manila the manufacturer could not get so much profit.

6. *Mr. Valentine.*] Do you ship any of the fine flax to London?—I have not shipped any to London for the last two or three years. I shipped some before that. Some fetched £42 a ton; but I have had so much experience with flax that I thought the time had arrived when prices would go down, consequently I stopped shipping and sold in my own market.

7. *Major Steward.*] In point of fact, manila rope largely consists of New Zealand flax?—Yes; and you could pick it all out.

8. *Mr. Mackenzie.*] I understand you have a machine by which you could turn out fibre worth £80 a ton?—I have not finished the machine quite. I am still working at it.

9. You hope to perfect it?—I think I shall. I see no difficulty.

10. And if it is perfected, and fibre comes from it in the state you hope to see it turned out, you think there is a demand for it at £80 a ton?—Yes.

11. For textile purposes?—Yes. I have been informed that this fibre would be worth from £80 to £100 a ton.

12. *Major Steward.*] Is it a fact that you went home some time ago in connection with flax matters?—Yes.

13. While you were there did you ascertain whether the fibre of New Zealand could be devoted to the purposes of textile fabrics successfully if properly prepared?—Yes.

14. And it was for that purpose, I presume, the large price you mention would be obtainable?—The large price would be obtainable for silk and linen adulteration and such purposes.

15. Is there any difficulty in getting rid of the gum which exists in the flax?—The gum is in the vegetable matter in which the fibre is embedded, but by putting the flax into the existing machinery and fining it down it takes it all out.

16. It is best to take the gum out without the use of chemicals?—Yes.

17. Is it not a fact that one of the difficulties of using flax for all Navy purposes—that is, for making ropes for ships, and so on—is alleged to be the circumstances under which the flax is at the present time prepared in the colony—that there is some amount of gum which prevents the tar soaking properly into the rope, and when the tar washes out, in consequence of this, it deteriorates it? is not that so?—Yes; when the fibre is not properly dressed or cleaned. If it is sold as it is sometimes dressed here it is not fibre at all: it would be vegetable matter and rope; in what we call 3in. rope, there would only be 1in. of fibre and two-thirds of vegetable matter. The vegetable matter rots and causes the rope to break.

18. Then, the fibre as turned out at present in the colony is not perfectly prepared?—No.

19. And the flax not utilised to its best possibilities?—No. All my customers have thought my fibre is of a satisfactory quality. I sent 100 tons to America last summer.

20. What was the financial result as regards the price per ton? Did it fetch a better price there than in London, or as good?—I sold it here, but it went to America. Three hundred tons went from the North Island, and I believe it was all condemned in America.

21. Do you know for what reason?—Yes. It was not suitably prepared.

22. *Mr. Mackenzie.*] Not for what?—Not suitable for the purpose it was wanted for—twining purposes.