

252. Not necessarily?—It would not perhaps.

253. There would be no compulsion at all; they would only use it if they chose?—I think the Government would recoup themselves in that way very substantially for any outlay. The Government would be more concerned in the immediate value they placed upon the article.

254. It is very obvious that if we are exporting large quantities of stuff from the colony, and that were to cease, the loss to the colony must be very great, and it is evident that it cannot continue if the prices paid at present continue?—There is an absolute loss.

255. To go back to the grading of the flax, you are strongly of opinion that it should be graded by experts at each port?—Yes.

256. You heard Mr. Chinnery suggest that an Inspector could be appointed at the mill?—It seems to me to be impracticable, unless a man were appointed permanently at each mill. The port of shipment is the proper place, I think. That is what they do with butter. As I have said before, in the South of Ireland they send it all to the butter exchange, where it is examined by paid officers, who put on it the brand according to the quality, and it goes to the outer world branded in this way, and is saleable.

257. And you think the proper way would be to examine one bale in every ten?—Approximately.

258. This expert would be paid by the Government, and some payment would have to be made towards the cost of the inspection?—Yes.

259. What would be the cost in addition to the payment of the Inspector? What would be the cost of opening and repacking these bales, do you suppose?—I think it could not possibly cost very much, probably 2s. or 3s. per bale.

260. Would it be injured in any way by being opened?—No.

261. It would be repacked in the same condition as it was before?—It frequently happens now that flax gets wet in transit on the Manawatu Railway, and we are very much interested in the way in which they deliver our flax. On several occasions we have had to return it. It gets wet in transit. I think it is from the fault of bad tarpaulin. If the engine puts a spark on the tarpaulins the rain gets into the flax, and we have to return it, to be dried and repacked.

262. Here?—No; it goes back to the mill.

263. You ought to be repaid the cost of that?—In the delivery of goods at a side station we get no receipts, and are at the mercy of the department.

264. They do not give you receipts more than the Government do?—I am afraid they all err in much the same direction.

265. Is it not a fact that the flax industry has been spoilt very much by inferior flax being sent Home and sold in the London market? Does it not spoil the sale of good flax?—Yes, unquestionably.

266. There is obviously a reason for a bonus to be given?—I say that the men who have no interest at stake send flax Home in any condition they like, and it necessarily gets into competition with the better article.

267. You know the Committee have been asked to offer suggestions as to what conditions the bonus should be offered upon, and there is a great difficulty in arriving at proper conditions to publish. Would you, when you go Home, and after thinking the matter very carefully over, give us your suggestions by letter as to the conditions you think should be laid down?—I shall be happy to do that.

268. *The Chairman.*] Do you not think that the best plan in offering a bonus would be to stipulate that there should be the production of a certain number of tons?—No, for this reason: that there would be many intending competitors, and some who, probably, would not have that opportunity at all. I think you should not confine the bonus to New Zealand, because there is no reason why English people, Americans, or even Scandinavians, should not compete for it; but they might not have the opportunity of dressing flax to send, but their machine might have a better result than others when tried.

269. You have seen the specimen of flax here to-day dressed by a machine: is it the first time you have seen flax dressed by a machine?—Is it dressed by a machine?

270. *The Chairman.*] That was a sample which Mr. Chinnery showed us this morning. It is extra fine; it was too fine, in fact, for the manufacture of rope, he said. I want to know what your opinion of that flax is generally?—I do not know the machine. But this (the flax) is not different to other flax which is represented as a sample, but I venture to say they cannot produce you 100 tons of it. All these things are produced as samples. I could produce a sample infinitely better than that, and Mr. Seymour would undertake to produce better again. You cannot do it in quantity to pay.

271. From your experience of the flax industry in Blenheim, are you aware that the flax is ever sorted before it is put into the machines?—Yes.

272. And different qualities are baled differently?—It is done in this way for the mere purpose of convenience in feeding the stripper. It sometimes happens that for the sake of convenience they put 12ft. lengths and 8ft. lengths together.

273. I mean the sorting of the various qualities: do you know anything about that from your own knowledge?—I do not think it exists.

274. Do the manufacturers classify at all?—No.

275. It has been stated that flax in many cases has been shipped from the wharf in Wellington in a very damp state, and, in fact, that there has been water running out of the bales: has anything happened like that to your knowledge?—I do not know of its existence. I think it must have been in very exceptional cases indeed where it occurred. The fault with the producer is that he does not take sufficient time to dress the fibre. For instance, the examination of his drums and the fining down is not done at regular intervals, and hence the stripper sticks, and so on; but, as to the actual baling of it up in a wet condition, I do not think that is done intentionally. The