

TUESDAY, 2ND SEPTEMBER, 1890.

Mr. JOSEPH SOLER examined.

174. *The Chairman.*] You are very much interested in the vine-culture?—Yes.

175. You have been accustomed to grow vines for many years?—I have been growing vines for a period of twenty-five years in Wanganui, and I have been growing vines in Tarragona, Spain, before coming to this colony.

176. Will you give us a short description of your vineyard and your process of vine-growing?—I first went to Victoria, and then came to New Zealand. When I arrived at Wanganui I saw that the climate was more suitable than that of Victoria. I returned to Victoria and obtained some vine-cuttings that I thought would be suitable for the climate of New Zealand. I came back with them to Wanganui, and have been there ever since. After the lapse of three years I began to make wines—not in large quantities—and I have been making wines ever since. The first time I sent wines to the Melbourne Exhibition I got six prizes. I next sent wines to the International Exhibition at Christchurch: I obtained the fourth-class medal. I sent wines to the Wellington Industrial Exhibition, and got another first-prize medal. I also forwarded wines to the London and Indian Exhibition, and got another medal. At the last Melbourne Exhibition I got another medal. I did not get any prize at the Dunedin Exhibition, as my exhibits were too late. What I have said will show what can be done with this industry in New Zealand. With our climate and soil the industry can be carried out on a large scale if the Government would only encourage it and place it on the same footing as in other colonies. We do not want any bonus. If the Government will only give us no more or no less than the other colonies receive we will be satisfied. All we want is for the Government to allow us to distil our own spirits of wine, to fortify our wines, so as to ship them away to other parts of New Zealand. At the present time we have to pay too heavy a duty on the spirits of wine. It will not pay to use it with a duty of £1 4s. a gallon upon it. The following are the best kinds of grapes for wine-making in New Zealand: (1) The Black Hamburg, as one of the finest table-grapes, and very good for mixing with other grapes in the manufacture of wine; (2) the Black July, as an early table-wine; (3) the White Frontignan, as an early table, and good for wine; (4) the Muscat of Alexandria, as a table-grape, and for preserving; (5) the Guzzly Frontignan for table use and for wine; (6) the Chasselas de Fontainebleau, as a table-grape, and for wine; (7) the Traminer Fromentean, as a wine-grape; (8) Black Frontignan, as a wine-grape; (9) the Dutch Sweetwater, good for wine; (10) the Black Burgundy, excellent for wine; (11) Black Morillon, as an early, and excellent for wine; (12) Muscat Hamber, good for wine; (13) Madespill Cort Black, good wine-grape. I guarantee that these are the best description of vines for the purpose stated.

177. What is the character of your soil?—It is a kind of volcanic soil—a white decomposed pumice. The best soil for the industry is pumice-stone. Some condemn it, but I recommend it as being as good as any soil in the world for the wine industry. It is a loose soil, and the vines grow deep down into it.

178. During the first two years do you require a great quantity of manure?—No. In Spain we plant vines in the rocks without any manure. You do not require any manure here for many years.

179. Have you any knowledge of the volcanic rocks of New Zealand?—Yes; I have been in the Province of Auckland, and have seen different vineyards there. Pumice soil is just as good as volcanic soil. The next best soil is sandy soil. Light stony soil and sandy soil are the best for vine-growing. The latter is the better of the two, as the insects have no shelter. There are no holes for them to breed in. The phylloxera, mildew, and black-rot are the three worst pests for the vine. I am not afraid of them myself. We have all sorts of insects in New Zealand. The phylloxera in Auckland is not the real phylloxera, which is a kind of worm, and eats up the roots of the vines. The use of lime and sulphur destroys all insects. By sprinkling a solution all round the vine-roots, the germs are destroyed, and there is no chance of phylloxera forming.

180. Have you any insect-pests in your vineyard?—I built a house with 14,000 square feet of glass in it, about three years ago. The vines were infested with the mealy-bug insect, but they are now free from that pest. I destroyed it with a solution of lime and sulphur, mixed with a little turpentine. Flour of sulphur applied to the vines with a pair of bellows destroys mildew. The first time to apply it is when the vines begin to blossom, the second when the grapes are half-grown or little more, and the third time when they are just colouring. If you use sulphur in the open air and rain falls the same day, you have to apply the sulphur again; but if you have a couple of dry days you do not require to do so. I have over two acres of vines in the open air, and the grapes ripen all right.

181. What yield do you get?—I grow 20 tons of grapes from the 2½ acres.

182. *Mr. Walker.*] You run them out on frames?—Yes.

183. How do you raise your cuttings?—I take cuttings from my own vines.

184. Is it possible to get any sort required?—Yes. If I receive twelve months' previous notice I prune so as to make cuttings. In the summer-time I cut the tender shoots, but if I receive notice I save them for cuttings.

185. *The Chairman.*] Do you make any charge for your cuttings?—Just enough to pay expenses.

186. *Mr. Walker.*] You have not got the phylloxera?—No.

187. *The Chairman.*] If you had a market it would pay you better to grow grapes for the table than for making wine?—In one way it would pay better, because you get ready cash, but it pays better making wine in the long-run. In the latter case you have to wait eight or nine years before you get your money back.

188. What did it cost you to put in an acre of vines?—I cannot say exactly: so much depends on how you train the vines. The best way to train vines is against wire fences 4ft. high, with two wires 2ft. apart. The vine is planted near the post, and shoots are led along the wires. They thus get the full benefit of the sun, and ripen better than in any other way.