57. Do you think there is an improvement in the present machinery as compared with that of 1871?—No, there is no improvement, except, of course, that you can put more through the machines. There is no improvement as far as quality goes. They use the same stripper and the same process as in 1871. A man named Price was the original inventor of the stripper, and Captain ———, of Taranaki, introduced the two-fluted feed-roller, driven by a separate belt.

58. About this matter of spontaneous combustion: does the flax itself take fire?—No, I do not think so.

59. Well, does not wool take fire?—Yes, wool takes fire if it is wet. I never heard of a wool-ship taking fire. I do not believe in spontaneous combustion with regard to flax.

60. But, without doubt, it has done so more than once?—I should like to test it.

61. *Mr. Symes.*] Do you know of your own knowledge if an arrangement was entered into by the New Zealand and the Australian merchants whereby binder-twine was not to be used in New Zealand except at a higher price than that of the Russian hemp?—I do not know.

62. Are you aware there are distinct fibres through all flax? About how many kinds are there?—I believe there are twenty kinds.

63. Do you know that spontaneous combustion is nonsense, and that millers, in bundling up the flax, apply water?—Well, suppose the fibre becomes too brittle to scutch, it may be damped a little, but not otherwise.

64. But this is in the bale?—Oh, no. It would ruin their market name.

65. *Hon. Mr. Ward.*] What is the average price per ton at which you can produce flax?—It depends upon the locality and the situation of the mill, and also on the price of the green fibre. As I stated, the process I am trying to bring out will reduce the cost of producing, I think, between £2 and £3 per ton.

66. Have you patented your process?—Rather. The various patents have been in existence for the last eight years. I have taken out several patents for the different machines. I took out my first patent in 1871, and worked at a machine for three years on the scraping principle. This did not prove a success. In 1890 I took out two more patents, and others from time to time. In all, I have made and tried practically four washing-machines since 1890, the last one, of recent date, only proving successful. I have also made and tried practically four scutching-machines. Only the last one of these came anywhere near the mark, and that is not yet completed; but, from trials with a small machine, gives very good results, and proves to be on the right lines, and will eventually, I think, be a great success, turning out a better fibre, with little waste, less power, and will command a far better price.

67. To enable this export of flax to succeed against the Russian article, do you want assistance from the State in the way of a subsidy or a contribution?—I have spent a great deal of time, and between £1,500 and £1,600. I understand that a bonus has been offered, and I think Government, if they think proper, should award me some proportion of that bonus to help me in the matter of making further experiments. You must understand that it is not a small thing. You have to have a whole flax-mill lying idle at your disposal, in order to try these different ideas, and the thing takes years. Seeing that there has been no improvement in the flax-making machinery for the last thirty years, although there have been hundreds at it, it is no small task to undertake. I would not undertake the same task again for £4,000. The work that I have done could not have been done in a foundry for £4,000. I have made eight different machines, and have tried them practically with a mill. I am sure the machinery can be improved very much.

68. Perhaps a bonus would enable you to develop your machinery?—Certainly.

69. If you do perfect your machine do you intend to sell to anybody who might desire to buy?—Anybody could have it at a certain royalty. It would be very foolish to kill the goose that lays the golden egg. I should charge a very small royalty so as to induce millers to take the machines. If these machines would save, say, £2 or £3 per ton they would be worth at least 7s. 6d. or 10s.

70. *Mr. Meredith.*] I understand you have a practical knowledge of the preparation of flax for export?—Yes.

71. What price do you think flax should command in the colony so as to offer sufficient inducement to develop the industry?—It would all depend on the Home market.

72. But what price should the prepared flax command at the port of export so as to justify encouraging the development of the industry?—It is a matter of supply and demand.

73. Then, at what figure could you produce the article so as to pay you?—I should say that if it could be delivered at 10s. a ton at the mill it could be produced at the mill at about £9 or £9 10s., or even less.

74. Then, you think that if prepared flax of good quality was £12 per ton at the mill, that would be sufficient inducement to encourage enterprise to develop the industry?—Yes, £12 or £12 10s. That is, not in the winter with the present process. With the present process it would be produced at the mill at £10 or £10 10s., in the summer, if royalty was low. With a better process you would save the tow, or a great portion of it.

75. If the tow had a commercial value?—It has not, only to a small extent.

76. But say it was £4 or £5 per ton: in that case the best quality of flax could be prepared at the mill for less than £12 a ton so as to justify encouraging the industry?—But I maintain there is no tow in the fibre, unless cut by the stripper or entangled in the field by wind, &c. The tow is caused by the scutcher dragging out the good fibre that should go into the bale. This can be proved by hackling the tow. By proper machinery this could, to a very great extent, be avoided, and a large saving effected.

77. We must take things as they are. It could be produced at £10, but that figure would not leave much for the miller. What is good prepared flax worth at the present time?—About £15 per ton in Wellington.