

many millers. Some millers may not perhaps desire advice from a Government instructor, but I am satisfied 90 per cent. would be only too glad to have such advice available, provided the right man is appointed. It would be a serious matter if the wrong man were appointed, because millers who have a certain amount of knowledge and experience in connection with milling may be wholly guided by such men, and, if incompetent, disaster would inevitably follow. The next important reform is the question of arriving at the proper standard of fibre desired by the foreign manufacturers. I have handled considerable quantities during the last two years, and I have had no complaints from my foreign buyers on the score of irregularity of grading, or any expression of dissatisfaction with the fibre they have received. They have, however, stated that they think we aim at too fine a class of fibre—that a coarser fibre would suit their requirements, and would suit them better providing the fibre was entirely free from diseased leaf, knots, and other evidence of imperfect stripping, such as backs and feather-edges, &c. In that connection I am inclined to think, though a miller, that the Government Grader should seriously penalise the miller who sends in stripped diseased leaf among “good fair” fibre. As far as my own mills are concerned, I have sent out circulars to the millers telling them that when the classers find diseased leaf they should put it to one side, and if it is not seriously destroyed by worm, &c., it could be put through the mill afterwards and used in a lower grade fibre. I have been in the grading stores at Bluff and have seen “good fair” fibre come in, and through each bale a quantity of diseased leaf appeared. The Grader was thus placed in the position of not knowing what to do with the line. Home importers receiving a bale with several hanks of inferior and absolutely useless fibre naturally would feel annoyed. There is really no excuse for the classer placing diseased blades in the hands of the feeder; it is inexcusable carelessness. I now come to the question of recasting of points. I have always felt that the readjustment of points was an absolute necessity. Personally I see no reason to retain on the schedule No. 1 Grade (“superior”). I am satisfied that only a small proportion of the output of the colony comes within that category; I have never been asked to supply it. I have been asked for the No. 2 Grade (“fine”), but only on rare occasions. I think ten points only between the various grades would be a desirable change. I disagree entirely with the fifteen points now existing between “fair” and “good fair”—that is, between sixty and seventy-four points. In support of this contention one has only to possess the knowledge of the value assessed by Home buyers on “fair” fibre as against “good fair” for the last year or so. Three years ago about £1 a ton was considered a fair margin, but latterly from £2 10s. to £3 a ton has been insisted upon, because the Home buyer, while buying “fair” fibre, that might reach seventy points or seventy-three points, stood a chance of receiving fibre that only went sixty points—one point removed from common—therefore he had to base his calculation on the minimum grade that he might be supplied with. This marginal allowance meant a serious loss to the miller, and I believe the excessive range in points has had a great deal to do with the disinclination of Home buyers to operate freely for the “fair” grade. At the Chamber of Commerce, Invercargill, I advocated this reform some considerable time ago, and I understand now that the Department is favourably disposed to such an alteration. While dealing with this question I think it would be in the interests of the industry if fibre under the “common” grade was absolutely prevented from leaving the colony. “Common” is not much sought after at Home, but intercolonially there is a considerable quantity sold. There is another matter which I am satisfied should be given effect to, and that is a reform in the method of tagging. At present Graders place a tag at one end of the bale denoting the grade, which can easily be removed in transit or at Home, and another tag substituted. If a grade ticket of similar material—a kind of parchment—was inserted by the Grader in any part of the bale, with the name of the mill on it if necessary from which the fibre came, it would obviate the danger of this rearrangement of tags. I had several lines graded “fair” at the Bluff last year comprising about 20-odd tons. I personally inspected the lines, and decided that the Grader had been too exacting. The lines graded from seventy-one to seventy-three points, and I considered they should have gone “good fair.” However, I did not attempt to tell the Grader his business, but shipped the line Home to be sold on its merits. I advised my London people to sell the line to the best advantage, and it realised “good fair” prices on the London market. My agents may have removed the tags and sold it with part of the “good fair” fibre that had been sent Home. There is a matter of detail which might be mentioned. I think a uniformity of baling should be insisted on by regulation both in regard to cube measurement and weight, because there are millers in Southland who are sending out bales from 2½ cwt. to 5 cwt., and uniformity is desirable for many reasons. Personally I think a bale of 4 cwt. is a very fair weight. There is one matter I omitted to mention. I think the Grader should place on the tags which he inserts in the bale the number of points that that particular line has reached. I understand this is objected to by some of the export merchants, but as an export merchant, and one feeling genuine interest in the success of the industry, I think such a step desirable. Moreover, it is only fair to the Grader, as it establishes his exact estimate of the parcel. When you consider there is a range of ten points, and the price each point will make when the fibre is selling at £27 and £28 a ton, there is a satisfaction to consumers in knowing whether they are being supplied with a bare grade or not. Coming to the question of flax-planting: In Southland, owing to the ravages of stock, the cutting of flax in the winter-time or off season, and the cultivation of the land, I am satisfied we shall never reach within 50 per cent. of last season’s output unless flax-planting is vigorously proceeded with. With this object in view I am of opinion that the Government should consider the advisableness of empowering the Land Boards to acquire suitable areas from existing pastoral tenants or small-grazing-run holders when such are applied for, because in many such cases the land is not bringing in a halfpenny per acre to the Crown, while it is capable of growing flax suitable for milling, and flax containing the least amount of vegetation. In the South hill-flax will turn out from 10 to 15 per cent. more fibre than flax off river-flats. I know of very many suitable localities in Southland convenient to railways and roads, the land held by pastoral tenants, with whom, of course, one