

29. You think he should go through the bales more minutely?—Yes, because it means a loss of £2 10s. or £3 to the miller if it is all put into one line and "fair" grade only.

30. What do you consider a fair medium?—Ten points.

31. Do you not think it would be a good thing for the Grader to grade and let the merchant pass it afterwards?—No. There is too much expense now; to put another shilling a ton on it would mean at the cost of the miller. The fibre has only to drop to £20 or £22 a ton for the whole of the industry to "pass out." There has been another suggestion in the South—that the points should run in fives. I hope that will never happen because a great difficulty now exists in fulfilling orders. A sale of 200 tons is made, say, "good" or "fair," spread deliveries over certain months; often to keep faith with our purchaser exporters have to buy in often at a loss. If the points were limited to five exporters would have more difficulty in completing orders.

32. You told us that Southland cannot produce the quantity of green flax again that it produced last year?—Yes, there will be a reduction of 50 per cent. this year.

33. Are any Southland people endeavouring to make up the quantity required?—Yes; I started planting flax myself, and it is doing very well; but I only started two years ago.

34. You did not know the values were going to keep up two years ago?—No, or else I should have gone in more extensively.

35. I think the Government might do this: If proposals were made to plant flax, they could assist to get the land at reasonable prices?—Yes. If they set the areas aside private enterprise would take it up—I am certain of that. But it will never pay private landowners to convert their swamps into flax-growing areas, because most of the swamp lands are the best lands we have, and flax is too uncertain to wait four years for a crop.

36. Then, you think that if a man is producing good grass he can do better than growing flax?—I am thoroughly satisfied of that, because you have to wait three or four years before you can get milling-flax.

37. Have you any idea of what an acre would produce?—I have gone into that, but it is simply hypothetical. My idea is to plant each root 10 ft. apart, and in rows. I was told by an expert that an acre of well-grown flax 8 ft. high would represent 60 tons. I think this is a fair estimate.

38. And that would take four years to grow?—Yes. Of course, the quantities of flax available for the miller based on the opinion of experts never come within 25 per cent. It is purely a guess.

39. Do you say it would take 8 to 10 tons of green leaf to the ton of fibre?—Yes, 8 tons on the average.

40. What do you estimate as the quantity of green flax to the acre?—It would depend entirely on the conditions. If you have water-power you can save £4 a ton on fibre in cost of manufacture.

41. *Mr. Buddo.*] You said you found fault with the Grader in not discriminating sufficiently with the different grades of flax-consignments. In forwarding consignments and in order to give the Grader some regular line of work, would it not be better when the output was leaving the mill to have some system of local grading in order to prevent every bale being opened and examined?—That would be impossible, because I have already stated that many of the managers of the mills are incompetent, and do not know whether they have manufactured "good fair" or "fair" when it comes to seventy-two and seventy-six points.

42. *Mr. Bollard.*] I understood you to say you considered the condemned flax ought not to be sent out of the colony?—That is so.

43. A flax-miller sometimes—probably through no fault of his own—produces flax that is not up to the mark, and it is condemned: is that not so?—No, it is through carelessness; the competent manager very often visits the paddock to see that the men are doing their work satisfactorily. There is no excuse for allowing hanks to lie on the ground until the strength and colour are gone. We have local manufacturers of rope and twine, and it is possible for these people to make some use of this inferior flax without allowing it to go out of the colony.

44. But supposing the demand is limited, and there is a demand for it in Australia, would you not agree to it being sold there?—I am speaking against my own interests as a miller, but I have not turned out condemned flax. You can see that there is a very small proportion of condemned flax, and I think every discouragement should be offered by the Department to producing it. If sent to Australia it could be transhipped Home.

45. You do not think there is a profitable market for it in Australia?—I do not think it should be allowed to leave our shores.

46. *Mr. Kirkbride.*] You said there were seventy mills working in Southland and only 15 per cent. paid?—Yes, that is right.

47. And yet you said that many of them were managed by good men?—I said managed by men capable of turning our good fibre.

48. You spoke of the Government appointing inspectors. You said there were very few managers of flax-mills who were really good all-round men, that you could count them on your fingers?—That is as far as Southland is concerned.

49. The two statements appear to me to be contradictory when you said there were good men?—An incompetent miller can often make "good fair" out of a medium standard of flax straw by knocking sufficient of it out into the tow-box. The stripping is the basis of the fibre. With good stripping and care in subsequent handling a high standard can always be reached.

50. You suggested that if the Government appointed expert instructors they should appoint practical men who had made a success of milling?—Yes, because you might appoint men of good reputation as millers who had not a sou to their names, proving they were wanting in some essential.

51. It appears to me that the choice would be limited?—In Southland there are men capable, but there are more in the North Island.