

ARTHUR EMERSON MABIN (Levin and Co., Wellington), representing the exporters, examined. (No. 6.)

*Witness:* I refer to one or two points that have come before the Committee. The first is regarding rejected flax, and I think the view of the Chamber of Commerce is that all flax should be allowed to find its proper market. There is no objection even to the worst grades going out of the colony as long as they are branded according to the grade. For instance, flax is required for all sorts of purposes—for mixing with manila, making binder-twine, ropes, lashings, &c. And the stuff we at the present time are refusing to allow out of the colony can find a good market in the United Kingdom, Australia, and elsewhere, and it can do no possible injury to the trade as long as it is branded with the brand of its grade. The Minister at the Conference mentioned that binder-twine could be made out of some of this rejected flax. I think we might let binder-twine manufacturers look after their own interests, and they are not going to make twine out of a class of flax that will ruin the sale of their twine in the future. They will use rough flax for other purposes. Another point raised by Mr. Frost is with regard to the grading-sheds. I think it is only right that flax should be graded where there is an accumulation of flax, whether in a grading-store or not. This affects Wellington, where Blenheim and Picton flax passes through. It is desirable in many cases to have flax graded in the Blenheim store and shipped direct from there without any overhauling in the Wellington store. I suggest that Blenheim merchants be allowed to have it graded in their stores there. The objection, I believe, is that it leaves tags open to removal and to fraud; but there is nothing in this objection. In regard to the range of points, I agree *in toto* about the range for a particular grade being confined to ten. I do not agree with Mr. Frost in his idea that they should be confined to five points. I cannot agree with Mr. Frost in the idea that the Government should give points alone and say nothing about the grades. The system has been built up by thirty or forty years' use, and the names for the grades are trade terms which it would be impossible for the Government or anybody here to upset. What we want to do is to bring our points into conformity with the trade terms. With regard to the branding of the bales—in this point lies the secret of the complaints arriving in the colony. As members of the Committee are aware, a large quantity of flax is shipped marked imperfectly, and the shipping companies acknowledge no responsibility for marks or numbers. This should be rectified. We cannot compel the shipping companies to do anything until we have put marking on a fairly firm basis. To my mind battens seem to be the only possible way of getting out of the difficulty. The flax is not undumped in London. It goes right through to the manufacturer, and the battens are securely held by the dumping-bands until the flax arrives at the manufactory. The suggestion of the Conference was that the grade should be shown by Xs, and if this suggestion were adopted you have got the whole history of the flax shown on the battens and on the bill of lading. The brand and the grade is shown on the bill of lading thus: Awa, Awa X, Awa XX, Awa XXX. If we have wooden battens insisted on and the grade shown on them, and let the system of grading and marking be known throughout by means of the High Commissioner the whole trouble would be got over. Wrong qualities have been delivered by the shipping companies at the other end through the labels having been lost; and consequently there were complaints. I agree with the previous witnesses with regard to standard bales, and also with regard to the court of appeal. I have a suggestion to make: If more confidence were felt in the Graders generally there would be less demand for an arbitration court. Mr. Ritchie has been very fortunate in other Departments, such as having Mr. Gilruth and Mr. Hyde and Mr. Kinsella at the head of their Departments. I think that if he had a man from a binder-twine factory under him, of some ability, there would be very little demand for an arbitration court. It is hard that a miller should be penalised, and have no court of appeal, when he has no confidence in the grading of his flax.

76. *Hon. Mr. Duncan.*] You say it is manifestly unfair that there should be no appeal from the Grader's certificate, and that it might not do any harm to export inferior flax?—None at all.

77. Do you know what brought down the price of the North Island mutton?—I do not know much about mutton, but I know a good deal about flax, and I know that exporting inferior flax, as long as you call it such, will not injure the market.

78. You know very well that everybody tries to make money; so do you and I—?—I have not been able to, so far.

79. And when they get the flax there they endeavour to make it into an article that is unsuitable, and the farmer says, "I will have no more New Zealand twine"?—They will not make binder-twine that they cannot sell.

80. I know as much about binder-twine as any man in the North Island, because I used it. With regard to the Xs for a grade, would it not be the easiest thing in the world to add an X?—An additional X would lower the quality.

81. I do not see why it would not be as easy removing them as a tag?—The battens suggested should show a rough surface, so it would be easy enough to find out. No one could interfere with the Xs without it being plainly seen the batten had been tampered with.

82. *Mr. Kirkbride.*] I was interested to hear that Mr. Mabin spoke for the Chamber of Commerce, and they were agreed that all flax should be exported?—Yes.

83. I suppose your idea would be that there are purposes for which the most inferior kinds of flax are used at Home?—Yes.

84. I think you could draw a parallel between wool and flax, and we certainly send Home inferior wool. I was rather disappointed with Mr. Mabin with regard to the reduction of points between grades. Do you not recognise that there would be a great difference in the quality of flax?—You misunderstand me. I agree with the Flax-millers' Association that there should be a range of ten points, but disagree with Mr. Frost when he says the range should be five points.

85. I understood you to say it should remain as it is?—Oh, no.

86. You also favour the idea that a Grader should go wherever there is a quantity of flax ready for export?—Yes.