

out first of all the real value of our fibre abroad, and then manufacture for that particular line. If our fibre is only sufficiently good for rope and twine, then the grades of "fine" and "superior" are no good to us, and might just as well be knocked off the schedule altogether, because they are only just a guide for merchants, and are of no practical use to the miller. There is another point: the value of our hemp of particular brands is not sufficiently known abroad. The points scored by the grade should go forward on the certificate, so that they should be known by the buyer or manufacturer on the other side, and some means should be devised by which the certificate of the Grader or the tag could not possibly be tampered with. On the grade, already touched upon, my opinion is that for grading purposes each line of flax should be graded according to its own merits or value. If "common" it should be graded as "common" for so many points, if "fair" the same way, and if "good fair" the same way. To illustrate this—I speak now as a ropemaker—a line of flax is offered to me as "good fair," valued in England at £32 per ton. A line is offered to me as "fair," 73-point stuff, valued in England at £27 10s. per ton. As a rope-manufacturer I look at the lines and see that the "fair" flax at £27 10s. per ton contains all the "good fair" hemp that I want for manufacturing purposes, at a lower price, and I buy that. The merchant who sells to me in New Zealand concludes that the "good fair" flax in sufficient quantities is contained in the "fair" flax, so he contracts with the New Zealand millers to mill that class of flax, and consequently no further values are reached. I contend that if it were possible to use that flax by further dressing abroad for fabrics—to, say, a value of £75 per ton—the colony as a whole and the millers generally are at just that much loss. There is also this consideration: not knowing the value of the flax abroad we are racing through the flax-swamps to manufacture an inferior article, depleting the swamps of the flax, and practically doing very little good for ourselves, whereas if we could mill a smaller quantity of flax at a standard value, then the flax-swamps would last longer, and we should all know just exactly what we were doing. I say, to get this information it is necessary that an expert should go abroad, that he should ascertain how much of our New Zealand fibre is imported into the different countries; how much it is improved abroad, or rather what work is expended upon it there that could be done in the colony; and what sort of machinery is used that could be manufactured here or imported to bring this flax to such a value that the money that they expend in further improving the flax abroad could be spent on improving it here. If it were ascertained for us that it was only usable for rope-making purposes, and ascertained from observation just what quality of flax is required, then fix that as the standard grade, and educate every miller to manufacture to it. As we are working at the present time, coming back to our own New Zealand mills, I want to emphasize this particularly, that there is not sufficient difference between "fair" and "good fair" flax. A merchant pays at the present time for "fair" £24 per ton. The grade-note shows that seventy-three points have been secured for the "fair." At the same time seventy-five points have been secured for the "good fair," yet the merchant pays £24 and £26 10s. per ton respectively, and the value to the ropemaker is in favour of the "fair" flax. I contend that the merchant makes a profit where the miller ought to make it. Then we come to the difference in the varying qualities of the flax. I consider that under the grading staff we certainly require, as we have in the butter industry, inspectors or instructors—whichever you may choose to term them—who would be able to ascertain how it is that certain mills are not turning out the good quality of flax that they should be able to turn out. To illustrate the use of an inspector, I was in a conference in Wellington some time ago when my attention was drawn to a line of flax that was condemned by the Graders. The same miller with the same machinery is turning out from the same leaf a flax which is pointing from seventy-five to eighty-three points, proving that it is possible under proper supervision to mill a "good fair" flax, even under adverse circumstances as far as the leaf is concerned. The difficulty is that with the question of points one man is a practical miller, and he knows why his flax would give the quality that it is; in other instances we have men engaged in the industry who know nothing about flax stripping, bleaching, and scutching. They are entirely at sea, depending altogether on employees, and where the employees go wrong they cannot set them right. If we had an instructor he could step into the proprietor's position and teach the men what to do. Then, again, we have in connection now with all our industries where steam power is used the Government certificate, which engine-drivers pass an examination to get. It is a recognised fact that with all our motor-power there should be some supervision and some care taken of boilers and machinery. Exactly the same with the flax-dressing. I say that our stripper-keepers who are practical men should have to pass an examination, and that like the engine-drivers they should be certificated. We should know then what sort of a man we were employing. There was one thing I should like to mention regarding the Grader's certificate—that is, that the points should at all times go forward on the certificate to the manufacturer on the other side. There is another point I have noticed—that is, as to the value of the grade. Do not think for a moment that I agree with the Graders, because I do not. In 1891 I manufactured a line of hemp. I was not in any way satisfied with the Graders, or with the Government interference in the flax industry. I was under the impression that flax was a line that the Government might have left alone. I took a hank of the 1891 manufactured flax, and asked the Head Grader and some of his staff to grade it. I took a hank of my own manufacture of 1905 flax—also a "good fair" line—and asked the Head Grader and his staff to point it. The 1891 line was graded 75-point stuff, and the 1905 flax was graded 76-point stuff. There was only one point difference between the two. It was very evident that there was the same general average; "good fair" quality then was "good fair" quality now. It showed that there was very little variation. I am perfectly satisfied from practical tests of the value of the grade. We all know its value if the Government will only go far enough—if they will only go as far as with the butter. Otherwise they are going to ruin the industry and throw us to the merchants. I have tested a line myself, and I asked what grade it would go into, and they put it into exactly the same position this week as they did last Christmas. I would like to also point out this with regard to the green leaf: if the Govern-