

put down in a low grade simply through the Graders demanding "fine" stripped fibre, that cannot be produced. I do not say that it cannot be produced, but it is not wanted, and "fine" fibre takes more work in the scutching.

23. In your opinion, is there that material difference in the hemp that if fine quality was required they could not with the same machinery turn it out in Southland as in any other place?—If a very fine quality of fibre was required, I would not recommend Southland to produce it. At the same time I want to be quite clear that I do not think such is the case, because all my experience points to the contrary.

24. You mention about the flax as it were getting scarcer, and not a large quantity to be found in any special place?—That is so.

25. Have none of the settlers done anything to remedy that?—Very little has been done; almost nothing.

26. What is the grade generally? Have you any standard in the price at which the flax is supplied to the millers?—No; it all depends upon the price ruling and the trade—anything between 5s. and 10s. or 12s. on the ground per ton, and from £1 5s. to £1 8s. delivered at the mill. It may be more or less.

27. Do you not think that if it would pay the Government to go into this matter it would pay the settler equally well to go into it—that the settler or the flax-miller could do it cheaper?—The drawback is that the time is too long to wait for results. As a rule, a man does not care to wait six or seven years for his returns, and then take a risk of fluctuations in the market.

28. Are you aware that the process of cutting, especially when the flax is cut too low, is against the growth of the flax?—I am well aware of that. The way it is cut now is simply wasting it.

29. And you think that some arrangement should be come to to stop that?—Yes, I am well aware of that. Some years ago I bought a quantity of flax, and the agreement was that I was not to cut within 9 in. of the root. In Southland half of the flax is almost grubbed up by the roots.

30. *Mr. McLachlan.*] You would not recommend the export of condemned flax? What use would you put it to here?—Well, I suppose the local twine-spinners here would buy it up and use it for making lashing, or probably put it into better stuff and use it for making twine.

31. It would be good enough for the New Zealand farmer?—It would appear like it. It could be used for rope-making, of course.

32. It could be used for low-grade rope; it would not be suitable for twine?—I would not recommend it for twine. It could be used for low-grade rope or lashing-rope.

33. It appears there is a great diversity of opinion amongst flax-millers about the grading? We had it here that it was giving satisfaction?—That is very easily understood. The man who is getting "fine" or "superior" is not likely to complain very much, because he is getting all he wants. If the people interested have not an opportunity of coming here and giving evidence, you cannot hear all sides of the question. From Lyttelton to the Bluff the only invitation sent out by the Committee was to the Chairman of the Invercargill Chamber of Commerce. We got no invitation to this inquiry until we asked for it. There is Mr. Wood, of Christchurch. The season before last he bought half the hemp in Southland, but he had no opportunity of giving evidence. I questioned him coming through. I could not find any invitation except to the Invercargill Chamber of Commerce. Surely the flax-millers ought to be equal to the merchants, at any rate.

34. Invitations were sent to all the Chambers of Commerce?—Our association received no invitation. It would be pleasing for us to know that, because we should have had very much more evidence.

35. I think it is the desire of the Department that every one interested should have an opportunity of placing his views before the Committee?—Mr. Steven, buyer for Wood and Co., of Christchurch, would have been very glad to come here, and Mr. Edwards, one of the oldest flax-millers in Southland. Our association got no invitation, except one from the Chairman of the Committee, after I wired to him asking for it; and, of course, we were very thankful to receive that, because we thought we were going to be debarred altogether.

36. Do you not think it would be to the advantage of the whole business to shift these Graders round about—the same as Wesleyan parsons?—If each Grader was kept in the one place until he got a thorough training there might be some uniformity in the grading. Our Grader was sent down without any training at all; I am positive of that.

37. This man who you say has been told to send in his resignation has been giving first-class satisfaction?—Yes, for the last twelve months. At first he was not.

38. *The Chairman.*] Have you heard any complaint about the removal of tags from bales—for instance, on the wharf or after being shipped?—I have never heard of an instance occurring; but I think it would be to the advantage of millers if something like a cloth tag were inserted in the bale. It could be easily forced in, and no one would know where it was.

39. There has been a consensus of opinion on that point. The desirability has been expressed of the appointment of experts—men to go around the various mills as instructors. Do you think it would be any good?—If the millers had any confidence in the man he might be able to do some good—he might be able to teach some of the millers something; but the whole thing would hinge on that. He would have to be an exceptional man, I think.

40. *Hon. Mr. Duncan.*] I should like to get something further about this difference between the grades. What is the average price of "fine" grade in Southland at present?—Well, up to last winter it would take you all your time to get £1 per ton more for "fine" than for "good fair"; but last winter there must have been some special demand for "fine," and it went up to £3 per ton more. Of course, it cannot be produced at all with us under the present system. The quantity of "fine" is trifling compared with the flax turned out.

41. That would almost go to show that in Southland they would be handicapped to the extent