

35. If the decomposition was sufficiently pronounced you say that it would have a detrimental effect upon stock?—Unquestionably.

36. Would it affect the health of the stock?—Yes, it would affect their growth and their health.

37. Their milking, in the case of cows?—Yes.

38. *Mr. Tripp.*] Can you tell us how sawdust affects fish-life?—I know that it destroys the fish. Sawdust ought to be burnt; so should the refuse from flax-mills.

PERCY EDWARD BALDWIN made a statement and was examined. (No. 19.)

1. *The Chairman.*] What are you?—A solicitor, and incidentally a farmer to a certain extent. I have full experience as to the state of affairs which existed in the Oroua River at the time the actions were instituted by Mr. W. Pearce, joined with the whole of the other farmers for a distance of some six miles of the Oroua River frontage, which actions were taken in the name of Mr. Pearce for convenience. I may make this exception: there was one man named Lucas—a partner, I think, of one of the flax-millers named Tennant—who was not joined in the action. But with that exception the whole of the landowners fronting on the Oroua River for a distance of six miles were forced to take the action which was taken. Now, the Oroua River for a distance of several miles is the only running water available for the watering of several thousand acres of the most fertile land in the Kairanga district. The only other supply is the water which runs through the three large drains—the Manawatu main drain, Burke's drain, and the Sluggish River main drain—all of which drains are vested in various Drainage Boards, and it is a matter of the gravest moment to these farmers that they should have drinkable water, both for themselves and their stock, from the Oroua River. The flax-milling industry has been carried on on the Oroua River, I am informed, for at least twenty years, but never—according to the evidence—by more than two mills at a time until quite recently. At the time the actions were instituted there were four mills upon the Oroua River, and three of those mills were in active operation. Since the deputation and the promise of legislation one other mill has commenced on the bank of the Oroua River, and there are now five mills in active operation discharging practically the whole of their effluent into the Oroua. I do not know if any members of the Committee outside of Mr. Buick are intimately acquainted with the Oroua River, but Mr. Buick will bear me out when I say that the Oroua in summer is a very small body of water indeed in relation to its winter carriage, and the flax-mills are working double shifts in the summer-time. Consequently the evidence as to pollution which was given in the Court does not represent one-tenth part of the pollution which that water is subjected to in summer-time, when it is most necessary for the stock and human beings that are dependent upon it. That being the condition of affairs—the flax-mills increasing in this proportion, and the flax-millers, as the farmers said, refusing to take any steps to effectively keep any part of their waste products from pouring into the river—the farmers combined together to institute proceedings to prevent the flax-millers from wantonly polluting the water. I say at once, on behalf of the people whom I represent, that they are as keenly interested—some of them—in the welfare of the flax-milling industry—I am not talking of pecuniary interest—but they are as keenly alive to the importance of the flax-milling industry as any other persons in New Zealand. But they must have water, and they felt that nothing was being done to enable them to use the water at all. In short, I want the Committee to understand that these were in no sense vexatious actions; they were actions taken by a large number of persons vitally concerned to have pure water, and only to force the flax-millers to cease flagrant pollution. The dangers in the Oroua River that the landowners saw from this flax effluent were three—firstly, the refuse in the way of fibre and tow escapes into the river to this day in considerable quantities, and forms barriers by collecting silt. It forms barriers, which result in erosion of the banks, and flooding of the land where the banks are low. I have here some photographs which were produced in the case, and I should like to show one instance of the quantity of fibre and tow which collected in a very short time at one of the mills.

2. When?—Within a few months.

3. Since the injunction?—It is exactly the same since the injunction.

4. *Mr. Buick.*] Is that waste of fibre going on still?—Yes. [Photograph produced.] That bank shown there is entirely green fibre. The reason why it was caused is shown by this second photograph [produced], which is a photograph of Jarvis's mill. They had four iron parallel bars across the shoot, and that was the only method Jarvis's mill had adopted up to the time of the injunction.

5. *The Chairman.*] This first photograph is not the Oroua, is it?—Yes; the photograph was taken from a place which makes it look very wide. It was in flood at the time. I was present when the photograph was taken. It is a river with a wide bed up there, but very little water. I was saying that the dangers the landowners saw were, firstly, the formation of these islands by the collection of debris; secondly, that the water was made unsafe for human consumption, unsafe for cleansing purposes, unsafe for butchering purposes, or any other purpose; and, thirdly, that the water had a very detrimental effect upon the stock—the cows and the horses. Now, we had to prove material pollution, and we succeeded. People talk lightly of injunctions, but the costs in that case to the winning side were over £200. It cost £200 for these people to establish their right to pure water.

6. *Mr. Buick.*] Has the injunction yet been applied for?—I was just coming to that. The injunction was granted some time in July. No steps whatever have been taken to have the injunction sealed by the Court or served on these flax-millers, or in any way to have it enforced. The plaintiffs only wanted pure water at as little expense and inconvenience to the flax-millers as was fair and proper, and they are still of the same mind. But Mr. Pearce will tell you that no real steps have been taken to minimize the damage at all, and that the damage is worse now