

TUESDAY, 15TH OCTOBER, 1912.

TOM PURDON, Farmer, of Raugiotu, examined. (No. 26.)

1. *The Chairman.*] Would you like to make a statement?—Yes, sir. I am bounded by the Oroua River, the Manawatu River, and Burke's drain, and the water in the river there and in the drain is polluted to such an extent that it will poison cattle. I have had to fence it off. Before it was fenced off I had a good deal of trouble, but since the rivers have been fenced off I have had no trouble. The trouble has been attributed to the water. I lost three cows last season, and I have lost one this season, from drinking the water. Burke's drain runs into the river; there is a mile of it; and as the river rises the water backs up and keeps the polluted water back, and it soaks the poisonous matter out of this vegetation. I do not say for a minute that the water coming direct from the mill would poison cattle. I was working at Seifert's mill for six years, and I drove a team there. I used to send the horses down to this river in front of the shoot to drink the water, and it never affected them. The reason for that was that the water did not stop long enough on the vegetation to soak out the poisonous matter. Another thing was that the vegetation, as we all know, floats. It is not until it sinks or gets washed up in a backwash and becomes stagnant that it becomes poisonous. It is the length of time the vegetation is in the water that causes the damage. If the vegetation were kept out I do not think the discoloured water would hurt cattle. I never had a Government Veterinary Surgeon to these cows of mine, but I got advice from Mr. Scott, a veterinary chemist in Palmerston. The cows died, and I did not know what was the matter with them. So I opened the second one. It died with the same symptoms as the first one. Mr. Scott could not come down, so I got a brother-in-law of mine, who had been in the dairying industry for twenty or twenty-five years, and we opened the beast and we found that the second stomach was inflamed so much as to indicate poisoning, and it was poisoned. I took a part of the stomach to Mr. Scott, and he said that the cow was poisoned with a fluid and not with a solid. I asked him if he could make out what was the cause of it. He said he had looked over my pasture and could see no weed or anything of that sort, and asked if I had any dirty barrels of any sort. I told him no, only the skim-milk barrel that I fed the pigs from. The only thing I could suggest to Mr. Scott was the Oroua River, because you may remember that last year up till about October it was very low—it was not more than about 4 ft. across. You could get across in any place with the water only up to your knees. The only thing I could think of was this water, so I fenced the Oroua River off, and I have had no more trouble. This year, about a month ago, I had a cow die on the bank of Burke's drain. Mr. Pearce was coming along, and I said to him that I was going to have some more trouble with my cows, and asked if he knew the cause of it. He said "You come with me." We went up Burke's drain a bit, and he said, "You take a bottle of that water and see if that is what is doing it." I took a bottle of that water to Mr. Scott, and Mr. Scott said it would kill anything. So I fenced the drain off, and I have had no trouble since. There are two neighbours and Mr. Pearce and myself on this block, which is just a point in the river. There is one other thing I desire to say. I think the millers can keep this stuff out of the river without much trouble. They could keep it all out without any trouble.

2. Would you mind suggesting how?—At the present time each miller has a man to catch this vegetation, as was stated here, and that vegetation is worth £7 or £8 a ton—I mean the stripper-droppings. I contend that if that scaly matter were gold the millers would catch it; they would not lose a grain of it. The way to catch it that I would suggest would be this: in the first place, the mill is close to the river-bank. They have not got room enough to work a shoot to stop that matter going into the river, and in the short distance it would overflow. I would suggest that they take it on an angle to give them more room, and if the water will come out of a 3 in. pipe it will go out of a 12 in. shoot, and with the grating they could catch most of the stuff, and with a gauze and a Y-shaped trough they could catch the remainder, because if the trough was deep enough the vegetation would rise and screen itself. The millers may say that that would overflow while they were cleaning it out. Well, they could make another trap and shut that one off while the man was cleaning it out, running the water through this other one. I do not see why that remedy should not work. My idea is that the quicker the water is in the river again the less poison there is in it. There is one mill I know that is going to put a 6 in. pipe into the river. I think that if the trough were made big enough it would catch it, just the same as it would with from 180 to 300 gallons a minute. There is at the present time more vegetation on my place and some willows down there than I should like to carry.

3. *Mr. Buick.*] What mill is it that is emptying into Burke's drain?—Green's, I think it is. When the river rises sometimes that water is kept back eight or ten days and cannot get out, and you get that poisonous water for two or three days afterwards, perhaps.

4. *Mr. Sykes.*] Since fencing off the drain you have not had the experience with your stock that you had last summer?—I had three die last summer.

5. Then you fenced off the drain?—No, I fenced off the Oroua River then.

6. You presume, then, that it is the stagnant water in summer-time that does the mischief?—Yes, and the backwash. This vegetation floats, and the wind from the opposite direction will send it over to the shore and on to the lee side. If you have the running stream, and it is running properly, you do not stand such a chance of getting the vegetation; it is when the river is low and the wind high that you get it all. And it ferments then; it is perfectly black on the bottom of the river.

7. *Mr. Buxton.*] You say that the millers can very easily keep the solids out of the river: we already have it in evidence that they are keeping the fibre out?—They are not keeping it out; it is coming down at the present time. What we say is that if the millers are allowed to put a certain portion in they will take permission to put more in.