

7. Speaking from the point of view not of one interest alone, but broadly from the public point of view, and knowing as you do a good deal of the circumstances of the case, do you think the suggested Bill is better than the Government Bill?—Yes, I do, although I should not like to express a very definite opinion, for I have not carefully considered it. The Government Bill, I think, is a monstrous Bill. If certain flax-millers are suffering an injustice and find themselves faced with a Supreme Court injunction obtained by Mr. Pearce, that certainly is not a reason for passing a sweeping measure of this kind, which is likely to do very great evil and injury to people situated otherwise than Mr. Pearce. I know that in my case—and I am only one out of a number—very serious results indeed are likely to follow the passing of such a sweeping measure as this. I say that some fairer way ought to be found out of the difficulty between Mr. Pearce and the flax-millers, without attacking the whole farming industry as this Bill may. We must not consider things as they are at present. We have got to consider the whole of the streams of the Dominion, and what the development of industries may be in future in this country. If a Bill like this passes and prescriptive rights are obtained under it, we may be in a very bad mess indeed, and it will hit back, in many cases, against the people whom the Bill is intended to help—the flax-millers, for instance. I should certainly refuse to supply a single blade of flax to this particular mill if I found that the effects arising from the Bill were such as I think they will be. And similarly you have it in evidence that the pollution of water by the dairy factories is likely to injure factories lower down. However, I am not here to-day to speak of dairy factories; but I do speak with some authority on the flax-refuse question. Men like myself who have bought property with a pure stream running through it, on the faith of the common law of England, and in the belief that that law will continue as it is, naturally expect that that water shall be allowed to remain pure. The farmer is not accountable for the nuisance. The flax-miller brings it upon him; therefore let the flax-miller take it away. This Bill does not say that the miller shall take proper steps to prevent the nuisance; it says “Create the nuisance as much as you like, and you farmers go for your damages if you can get them.”

8. Do you think that a small farmer bringing an action against a flax-miller would be met by an association of flax-millers—and we are told there are fifty-odd different flax-mills—do you think he would be met by all the weight and money and influence of the association in defending the action for an injunction or damages?—I think it would be more than probable, because they are naturally banded together for their joint protection.

9. Have the flax-millers an association now?—Yes. They know that a judgment—as in Mr. Pearce’s case—delivered in one part of the country becomes the law with regard to the whole country, and therefore it is their business to protect their industry in every possible way. I should be very much surprised if there was not a fighting fund provided by the association for the purpose of combating action such as this.

C. K. WILSON, M.P., examined. (No. 39.)

1. *The Chairman.*] Will you repeat to the Committee what you told me as to the silting-up of the Manawatu River within your own experience?—What I told you, as showing the evil effects of the flax, in the Manawatu River particularly, was that where some years ago it was impossible to cross the river owing to the depth of the water, I crossed it recently on the silt that had deposited in the river. It has raised the bed of the river to such a height that I could cross on foot. I was fishing at the time. It was all silted up, and the loose fibre and the waste had brought about that condition.

2. *Mr. Sykes.*] Are you not aware of the fact that the beds of a good many of the rivers in New Zealand are being raised, though there are no flax-mills on the banks?—I am only speaking of this particular case. I am satisfied that this was caused by the waste flax from the flax-mills. The loose tow sank as I walked over it.

3. *Mr. Pearce.*] Are you aware that thirty years ago the tide used to come many miles further up?—No, I could not speak as to that.

TUESDAY, 22ND OCTOBER, 1912.

Dr. VALINTINE, Chief Health Officer, examined. (No. 40.)

1. *The Chairman.*] You know what the business of the Committee is, doctor; will you kindly give us your view of the whole matter as it affects the flax-mills and the dairy factories?—Acting under your instructions, sir, I have perused the evidence taken with regard to the above Bill, and have the honour to submit the following matters for the consideration of your Committee. In the first place I would respectfully submit that the natural surface watercourses of this country should be regarded as potential sources of water-supply for the purposes of human consumption, and that, far from granting facilities for the pollution of our watercourses, every reasonable precaution should be taken to maintain their potability. In making this statement I am prompted by the fact that many towns and villages in this country which in the first place were conveniently situated as regards potential sources of public water-supply have been prevented from making such provisions on account of the pollution of the streams in their immediate neighbourhood. This has necessitated the authorities looking for a water-supply from a more remote and, therefore, less polluted source, but the expense involved has deterred many a town and hamlet from the undertaking. If this is the case when the population of the country is little more than a million, what will be the position when the country embraces a population three or four times its present size? Surely we ought to look ahead. Nevertheless, I am bound to admit that the interests of our industries must be considered. It would be idle to imagine that all trade and