

capped by the railway freights. The Railway Department makes us pay £25 a year for our siding, and we use it as little as possible. The great increase in the cost of steel, from £7 10s. to £35, and the fact that it has become unprocurable has put us out of making telegraph-poles. Our output of slates is about six thousand slates of Ardolith a week, and by an extension of our buildings we could increase the output to sixty thousand. We do not want spoon-feeding, but we want the Government Departments off our back. There are about a hundred slates in a crate and about seven hundred to the ton. I may state that we patented the reinforced-concrete piles. Undoubtedly it was an entirely new idea. But the Government stole the idea from us, and got prisoners to do the work in Canterbury; but they could not make the piles anything like ours in quality. It was the Inspector of Prisons who got the prisoners to make these piles. Persons came out to see what we were doing, and the next thing we knew was that prisoners were making these poles in prison institutions in Canterbury, but they cannot compete with us either in price or quality. When times become normal we will resume the work, and we have reason to believe that the Prisons Department will not do so. At present we are compelled by force of circumstances to get our asbestos from abroad. Yet we know that the substance is in New Zealand. Will the Government help us to get the deposits in New Zealand? So long as the bulk of the asbestos comes from overseas and our New Zealand deposits remain undeveloped, I think there ought to be some slight differentiation between the asbestos—the raw material—as against the imported slates made from asbestos. That is in the interests of those engaged in trying to develop the deposits in New Zealand.

1. *To Mr. Hornsby.*] I have been a little unguarded perhaps in saying that I know that there are quantities of asbestos deposits in the Nelson District. I should have said that I have had assurances quite recently that samples were shown by a representative of the Takaka Company—a Canterbury man—who said he was assured by an expert miner and mineralogist, who said that the asbestos was five-eighths of an inch in length, and was pure, fibrous, and silky; and it was stated that there were large quantities of the material in sight. The samples I was shown, some of which I have here, are quite suitable for our business. I would suggest that the Committee should take the evidence of the following gentlemen on this question, for they have taken a great interest in the matter: J. A. Wallace (Mayor of Motueka), Mr. Manoy and Mr. Orchard (of Christchurch); and the Committee might also take the evidence of Mr. Morgan, of the Geological Department. I understand that the last-named gentleman states that up to the present time asbestos in considerable quantities has not yet been discovered in New Zealand, although samples had been obtained from certain districts. I think that the tiles we manufacture should be put in the same class of the railway tariff as New Zealand earthenware tiles. We have every ground of analogy in asking that New-Zealand-made tiles and New-Zealand-made asbestos slates should be in one class. Asbestos slates at present are carried under the N Class, and the tiles are carried in a much lower class—I think, the P or Q Class.

2. *To Dr. A. K. Newman.*] I cannot say whether there are any deposits of second-class asbestos in New Zealand. I may state that I had a good deal of conversation with Mr. Aston, Government Chemist, who was in the district at the time, and he seemed to take the deepest interest in the question. The whole thing appeared to be too big a proposition for a small company to develop, but a miner had been prospecting on the land for some years—I am referring to the lease at Mount Arthur. The best quality is in the least proportion, of course, but I understand that at two places there is a large quantity of the material.

3. *To Mr. Veitch.*] It was costing a penny a pound to pack down to Motueka. In regard to development and the question of price and as to competition with the imported article, I may state that Mr. Orchard, the last man with whom I had a conversation on the matter, has gone down to Christchurch to communicate with his partners, and he will furnish particulars showing the prices both before the enormous freights were charged and also without the high freights. He said he would look into the matter, but he was almost sure that he could offer us a better article than the imported under both heads, and I replied that we would make a contract with them if he could do so.

4. *To Mr. Craigie.*] Our grievance against the Railway Department is on account of the differential charges. If asbestos can be found and supplied in sufficient quantities the articles produced would be a New Zealand manufacture right through. As to the question of the durability of asbestos slates, I think there is no end to the life of the article. I do not think there is any disintegration possible, because the materials are not subject to climatic changes. We have quite a ready market for the article.

5. *To Mr. Sidey.*] We have frequently made representations to the Railway Department with regard to the freights. We want to be put on the same footing as locally manufactured tiles—to have the railway freights altered in the direction I have suggested. The charge for asbestos is an extremely large freight—it is a terrific rate. At present we employ from nine to eleven hands, but it is at present only a one-unit plant.

6. *To Mr. Hudson.*] I met Mr. Wallace, Mayor of Motueka, and Mr. Manoy, who is a leading merchant in the Nelson District, and I think they are about as keen men as I know.

7. *To the Chairman.*] The Railway Department interprets “slates” as “natural slates.” In support of our contention we can make the same analogy between manufactured slates and manufactured tiles.

Dr. J. ALLAN THOMSON, Director of the Dominion Museum, examined. (No. 15.)

I appear before the Committee to-day as the representative of the New Zealand Institute. I have brought along the files of the *New Zealand Journal of Science and Technology*, of which I am the editor. I have prepared a list of the papers in it that will be of special interest to the Committee. The *Journal* combines two ideas: it has departmental reports, and it gives information on industrial matters from the scientific point of view.