

(No. 27.)—CHAIRMAN to H.B.M. CONSUL, Manilla, Philippine Islands.—19th December, 1870.

A Commission has been appointed by the New Zealand Government to inquire into and report upon the best mode of extracting and manufacturing the fibre of the *Phormium tenax*, and the Commissioners are desirous of obtaining the fullest information as to the processes by which the Manilla hemp is prepared. I have therefore no hesitation in applying to you to furnish me with any particulars which may be at your disposal, in the way of reports or publications that bear upon the subject, feeling sure that you will be ready to aid in solving a question which is of great importance to this part of the British Empire; and I beg to add that C. H. Warren, Esq., has been requested to defray any expenses that may be incurred in the purchase and transmission of pamphlets or books to this Colony.

(No. 91.)—Mr. J. C. RICKETTS, H.B.M. Consul, Manilla, to the CHAIRMAN.—6th April, 1871.

In reply to your letter of the 19th of December, 1870, relative to the processes by which the Manilla hemp is prepared, I beg to inform you that machinery has lately been invented by a Spaniard for the working up the hemp, but with what chance of success it is not as yet known.

Hitherto the hemp has been prepared entirely by manual labour. The process is simple enough, and somewhat as follows:—

The tree from which the hemp is made, *Musa textilis* or *Wild Plantain*, having attained the age of two and a half to three years, is cut down and stripped of its folds; these are then divided into pieces 3 or 4 inches wide, and the pulpy part separated by drawing them under a knife fixed in a block for that purpose. The fibre is thus laid bare, and is then placed in the sun to dry. It is then fit for commercial purposes.

If the plant be left for any length of time on the ground after having been cut down, the hemp assumes a reddish tinge and is not very suitable to commerce.

This process is somewhat laborious, and in the absence of all machinery very troublesome. The hemp is however of a good quality. The cordage is made in the same way as in Europe.

The hemp made in your Colony is apparently produced from the flax leaf; that made here is produced from the cortex of the wild plantain tree. The process, therefore, of manufacturing it would be very dissimilar, and the little information I have herein given you will I fear be of little service. I know of nothing published on this subject in Manilla.

Would the *Musa textilis* grow in New Zealand? If so, would it not be worth introducing? It is reproduced the same as any other plantain tree, and without any difficulty in this country—a plantation being formed fit to take a crop from at the end of the third year.

This plantain tree is also exceedingly prolific, yielding numerous shoots, which can if necessary be transplanted.

(No. 74.)—Mr. MORRISON to the CHAIRMAN.—15th April, 1871.

Adverting to my letter No. 93, of the 4th ultimo, I have the honor to transmit herewith copy of a letter from Dr. Forbes Watson, respecting certain publications having reference to the cultivation and mode of preparation of Manilla fibre; and I beg to acquaint you that the books mentioned therein cannot be procured through any bookseller, both being out of print and extremely scarce. Under these circumstances I have caused them to be advertised for, but as yet without success.

Dr. WATSON to Mr. MORRISON.—24th March, 1871.

Referring to the subject of your letter of the 15th instant, I have now the pleasure to enclose a set of papers giving the necessary particulars regarding the effort which the Indian Government is making to procure a machine to prepare the Rhea or China Grass fibre.

I likewise take the same opportunity of replying to your favour of the 12th instant, requesting, on behalf of the the New Zealand Flax Commission, to be supplied with a list of publications referring to the cultivation of the Manilla fibre. This fibre, as you are probably aware, is not cultivated in India, and it so happens that the information respecting it is of a very imperfect description. The only references to which after a careful search I can direct you are to be found in Royle's "Fibrous Plants of India," pp. 64-69, and in the "Technologist," vol. iii. pp. 118 and 119.

Royle's work is out of print, but a copy of it could probably be obtained on application to Whelden, the second-hand bookseller, in Great Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields; and it is likely that the required volume of the "Technologist" could be got through the same agency.

And with apologies for the delay in replying to your communications, &c.

RHEEA, OR CHINA GRASS FIBRE.—India Office, 13th March, 1871.

The Secretary of State for India has received the following Despatch from the Government of India, announcing the farther postponement of the trials for the prizes offered for machinery for the preparation of the Rhea fibre for the European market.