LOUIS SEIFERT, Flax-miller, examined. (No. 4.)

1. *The Chairman.*] Do you wish to make a statement?—Yes, sir. I have been in the milling business for about twelve years in the Manawatu, and also in the Rangitikei. One point that I particularly want to make is this: I think the idea of a lot of people is that under this Bill we want to do something worse than we have been doing heretofore. As a matter of fact, we are using better methods now for discharging the effluent and the waste into the rivers than were employed years ago. Years ago tow and dust and all the waste fibre went into the river, and a good deal of good fibre too, naturally. Now there is a proper system of wheels and gratings, which have been installed during the last two years. All the mills have not had them put on till practically the last twelve months. So that in the last twelve months the conditions have been much better than they were previously. It seems an extraordinary thing that in the big boom of 1907–11, when there were about seventy-eight mills working in the Manawatu district, there was not one single complaint or one case of typhoid fever or anything of that sort. That was during the time the biggest quantity was turned out—about 17,000 tons was turned out from that district out of about 30,000 tons for the whole of New Zealand. There was a large percentage of solids went into the rivers during those years, and it seems extraordinary that now, when there are practically no solids go in and the conditions have improved, these complaints are heard. In no instance, I think, has a person proved that one beast or one human being has been affected by the water from those rivers in twenty years. I heard the statement made that the vegetation could be kept out of the water successfully. I am not going to say that it is impossible to keep the vegetation out, but what I do say is that the percentage of solids in the vegetation is very small indeed. The vegetation from the flax itself is composed mostly of water when it is condensed. When the flax is stripped there is a certain quantity of vegetation falls from the fibre: some of it is wheeled away, and a small proportion may go into the river; but most of that is composed of water. There would only be about 10 per cent. of it solid. Therefore the proportion of solids going into the river is practically nothing at the present time. I have a river frontage to the Manawatu of three-quarters of a mile. I have stock there—horses, cattle, and sheep—and we have been drinking the water from that river for some twelve years, and we have not had a single case of typhoid or anything else. I want to point out that the discharge from the Oroua River goes into the Manawatu, and the mills that are working on the Manawatu further up would make it nearly as bad as the Oroua water. Although the Oroua Stream is much smaller than the Manawatu, the percentage of mills on the Manawatu is much larger: so one counterbalances the other. With the improved conditions that have obtained during the last twelve months one can hardly understand how it can be suggested that the position is getting worse. It is not likely to get worse, because the flax-areas in the Manawatu are developed practically to their full extent now. It is very unlikely, then, that there will be a larger out-turn; and if the river could stand it for the last twenty years I can hardly see why it cannot now. With regard to keeping all the vegetation out of the water, at Miranui we do keep all the vegetation out. I refer to the big mill between Shannon and Tokomaru. The water from that mill we run into a large dam. The vegetation is caught in this dam. The water oozes over the top of this dam and runs into a drain, then into the Tokomaru Stream, and finally into the Manawatu River. I venture to state that that water is very much worse than any of the water that is running direct from a mill into the Manawatu, for the reason that it is lying there in a putrid state. It is filtered through this rotten vegetation, and when it goes into the river it is as black as your hat. Water going straight from the mill I would not be afraid to drink; there is only the dye from the flax in it. If we employed a system of dams to filter the vegetation from the water it would simply mean that we would be putting the effluent into the river in a putrid state. It has got to get into the river finally, and it would reach the river in a worse state than at the present time. It was merely an accident, I may say, that this case ever came on. The trouble now is that a great number of people realize they can get an injunction against the flax-millers, and if there is any friction a miller is likely to have an injunction taken out against him. The millers are out to improve the position, and want to do everything in their power. If we thought we were doing any harm to any people above or below us, we would use every endeavour to prevent it. The millers want to improve the conditions, and they have improved them; and with the Bill I do not think any one would have any cause for complaint. There are several safeguards in the Bill. One other point: I have noticed any quantity of trout and whitebait on both sides of the mills. I cannot say so much for the Oroua, but I know it very well, and I know that at my brother's and Smith's mill they drank the water from the river for two or three years, and there was no trouble—no case of typhoid; I never heard anything about it at all till after this case came on.

2. *Mr. Sykes.*] You said that during twenty years there were no cases of typhoid connected with the work in the flax-mills. To what cause do you attribute the recent outbreak of typhoid among the flax-mill employees on the west coast of this Island?—I cannot account for it at all, because the conditions are really better now than they ever were. There is more care taken at the mills in regard to pure water.

3. Is artesian water provided for the workers?—At some of the mills it is provided, but not all. No doubt it will be provided from this out. There is no difficulty in providing it by sinking a pipe.

4. Is it reasonable to suppose that the refuse which was placed in the river in such large quantities a few years ago is proving detrimental to that water to-day? Has it all washed away, or is it there in a festering condition?—It has pretty well all washed away. Anything that does not float would go to the bottom. I have never noticed any decaying vegetation in a winter's flood. These floods remove everything, as a rule. In any case the river-water is not fit to drink, apart from the mills altogether. On one occasion I saw above my mill a dead horse in the stream,