

THE HEMP INDUSTRY.

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WHILE the hemp reaching the ports of Wellington and Foxton is showing an increase on the quantity handled at this time last year, the quality is also showing an improvement. In several cases millers are being compelled to deal with unsatisfactory leaf, suffering considerably from the effects of disease, and "fair" is the best grade they can reach. However, the extent of diseased leaf is not so great as it was last season. Some fibre was damaged to a slight extent by the wet weather. The general improvement noticeable is in stripping and colour. The chief weakness—and it is as pronounced as it was last season—is in scutching. Very few millers are adopting the excellent idea, illustrated in the September issue of the *Journal*, of cutting out the tail ends in the paddock, thus leaving the objectionable tow-balls.

MILL IMPROVEMENTS.

On a recent visit of inspection to the mills of the Manawatu I was greatly struck with the indications of progress taking place in the work of milling. Plants are being brought more up to date, while the capacity of a number has been increased. The patent Suttie catcher and washer is being generally installed; while a feature of the extension being made on the plants is the conversion of single-stripper mills into mills operating two and three strippers, thus doubling and trebling the capacity. The swamps are being more carefully managed, the necessity of clearing rubbish as the cutting proceeds being now more generally recognized. Unfortunately, in some of the swamps the leaf is being cut too far into the butt, with the result that the trade is being supplied with a badly stained hemp. It may be well to remind millers that staining from the butt is especially prejudicial to high-grade quality. Manufacturers demand an absolutely clean and even colour in the best quality of fibre.

At present market values mills in the Auckland and Southland districts are not likely to mill to any extent, owing to the raw material being in scattered locations and the cost of transit of the milled fibre, while few of the mills in these districts have the up-to-date plants general in the Manawatu.

A slight improvement in the value of hemp took place last month, which created an improved demand. Good prices are being paid for tow. With the present big output of Manila it is not probable that any decided advance will take place in the value of phormium-fibre in the near future.