

## THE HEMP INDUSTRY.

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### GENERAL DETERIORATION IN QUALITY.

NOTWITHSTANDING the splendid values ruling for high-quality fibre the phormium hemp graded in the Dominion last month was of a most disappointing character. Especially is the position unsatisfactory when it is remembered that the milling plant has been greatly improved during the last few years, thereby making it possible to produce a much freer and better-coloured fibre. The principal cause of the serious decline in quality is, in my opinion, poor stripping, due either to a desire to strip more fibre than the stripper is capable of treating effectively, to careless work on the part of the stripper-keeper, or the employment of inexperienced men. In many cases the phormium-leaf has been merely split, owing to the stripper not being maintained at the correct set, due either to a desire on the part of the miller to rush as much leaf through as possible irrespective of quality, or to carelessness on the part of the stripper-keeper. For the same reason much of the hemp has been bruised, and thereby reduced in strength. The stripping being bad, after-processes have failed to correct the weakness. Where the vegetation has not been properly removed from the fibre, no system of washing or bleaching will ensure a good colour. Where the stripping has been satisfactory the fibre has had in a few cases to be graded down owing to the poor scutching, and bad scutching is often more serious from the cordage-manufacturer's point of view than bad stripping. The latter may leave considerable vegetable matter adhering to the fibre and may cause it to have a poor colour, but the fibre will not be knotted or towy. Of course, it is impossible to properly scutch fibre bruised in the stripping process. The more such fibre is scutched the worse its condition becomes.

It is not forgotten that some mills have badly diseased leaf to deal with—leaf from which nothing but a common grade can be produced; but these mills are excluded from the above remarks. Some of the best mills in the country, having a good leaf to deal with, are turning out the unsatisfactory fibre. Not for six or seven years has such a high percentage of low-grade fibre reached the grading-stores. There is little doubt it is chiefly due to the high values ruling, as the unsatisfactory milling-work became noticeable last November and has continued to the present time, being very accentuated last month. Between the