

previous and the present boom the general standard of our fibre was excellent. Certainly, only the best mills were working at the lower values, but these were palpably intent on aiming at quality rather than quantity. Now, as in the previous boom-time, the position is reversed, and everything is apparently being sacrificed to quantity. More money may be made by turning out a huge output of low-grade fibre, which can be sold at a high price, but it is doubtful if it is more profitable even now than milling a superior article, and is certainly against a permanent demand for phormium the reputation of which is being imperilled by the present short-sighted policy.

There is a big demand for "good-fair" fibre, but there is no fibre of this quality available—a matter for very great regret, as good-fair has been our standard quality for binder-twine. If this grade is not obtainable, cordage-manufacturers will be compelled to use other fibres for this purpose, to our permanent disadvantage. Australian binder-twine manufacturers would take New Zealand good-fair in preference to Manila, but as the former is unobtainable they are being forced to use Manila. Even our high-pointed fair cannot be used for binder-twine, owing to being too coarse and wiry.

A very bad feature of some lines coming forward is that, evidently with the idea of utilizing every scrap of fibre, some hanks are being "faced" with good fibre, giving the drawn hank the appearance of being of decent quality; but when the hank is opened up for inspection it is found to contain hemp of a very inferior description. This has not occurred for some years, and is to be deplored. At a time like the present it is particularly unfortunate, as the graders are busy enough with a record output to deal with without having to examine more hanks than should be necessary in order to discover if the "facing" trick is in evidence. As a consequence, strict instructions have been issued to the graders to examine the hemp as thoroughly as possible. I am continually expecting to have complaints as to grading, owing to the apparent prevalence of the "facing" deception.

The only districts turning out decent-quality fibre at the present time are Hawke's Bay, Marlborough, and Canterbury. The poor quality is confined to Auckland, Wellington, and Southland districts. Westland fibre is not so bad, but has gone back in quality owing to defective scutching of the tail-ends.

Stripper-slips have in many cases been coming to hand in a damp and even wet condition. A considerable number of bales have had to be condemned in consequence.

Needless to say, tow has been unsatisfactory—its quality is a reflex of that of the hemp. Condemnations on account of bad shaking and poor colour have been general.