

tain extent, to the difficulty connected with its preparation, is most strikingly shown in the fact, that a society established in that country in 1841, for the purpose of promoting and encouraging the growth of flax, which numbers "among its members, the nobility and landed gentry on one hand, and on the other nearly all the individuals engaged in the spinning of yarn and manufacture of linen, with a considerable proportion of the wealthy English and Scotch flax spinners," which for the last three years has been backed by annual grants of the public money, and which has devoted "ten years of unremitting exertions" to the subject, has, so far from being enabled to accomplish the object for which it was formed, that it has not been able to arrest the decrease in the cultivation of flax in Ireland, from 33,000 acres in 1841, to 60,000 in 1849. This rapid decrease of flax culture has also taken place contemporaneously with an increase, unparalleled in the history of the linen manufactures, the raw materials to supply which have been obtained from the foreigner instead of the home producer.

The Royal Flax Society has done all in its power to produce a different result. Every improvement in the mode of steeping, or in the after-treatment of flax, has received some share of its attention; and directions of the simplest and plainest character have been widely distributed over the country, for the purpose of enabling the grower to avail himself of the advantages which it offered.

The society has also, with the most ready zeal, come forward upon the bare announcement of any plan, by which the grower could be relieved from this obnoxious process, and which it conceived was, therefore, calculated to mislead the public, and denounced the ignorance and folly of those who supported it. Indeed, so great has been the vigilance and care exercised by the society, that their condemnation has, in several instances, preceded investigation. At a meeting of the County of Cork Flax Association, the subject of a new mode of preparing flax, by which the grower would be spared the trouble of steeping, was referred to by one of the speakers, when Professor Murphy, who attended on the part of the parent society, said, that "the Flax Society had reported against the process, and were then going to investigate the matter." Despite all these laudable exertions, however, the cultivation of flax has greatly fallen off, and instead of that lively interest which it would have been desirable to have seen displayed on the subject by the cultivators of land in Ireland, there appeared, up to a very recent period, when the probability was announced of new markets being opened for the produce, a determination on the part of some of the principal growers, to discontinue altogether the growth of flax. This feeling of apathy on the subject is not confined to the growers of flax merely; but it is also to be regretted that, even among the supporters of a society calculated to be of such great service to the country, the same feeling very generally prevails, as is evidenced by the fact of the decrease in the amount of subscriptions and donations, during the last as compared with previous years. Although many instances might be quoted to shew, that considerable profit and advantage would result to the grower from the preparation of his flax by the ordinary mode of steeping, still the great inconvenience and trouble attendant upon the process would prevent that general cultivation of the crop which it would be desirable to witness in order to secure for our agriculturists and manufacturers that amount of independence of foreign countries for the supply of the raw material which they do not at present possess. It is vain to expect any increased cultivation of flax while such a state of

things exists as that described by M. Peyen, the celebrated French colonist, who was last year sent over by the French Government to report upon the subject of flax-cultivation in Ireland. "While personally inspecting," says that gentleman in his report to the Government, "from the 15th to the 20th of Sept., the flax fields in Ireland, I found all the inconveniences of the old system of management in a high degree of intensity, in the serious inconveniences of the watering in stagnant pools and of the spreading of the putrid products of this most disagreeable operation, diffusing abroad insupportable exhalations." It will be shewn presently that by the use of machinery of a very simple and inexpensive character,* that the grower of flax may be spared all this inconvenience, and be enabled to send his produce to a certain and remunerative market, without the necessity of steeping it, and may also avoid those evils which, under the flax factorship system recently introduced into Ireland, have inflicted so much injury upon the flax cause, and discouraged many of the warmest of its friends in that country.

But a fourth reason, why notwithstanding the profitable nature of the crop, flax has been grown to so small an extent, is to be found in the uncertainty of the market which has hitherto existed for the article. Several striking instances are given of this in the report of the proceedings before the Royal Agricultural Society already referred to. Lord Montague, who attended the meeting as one of the members of a deputation from the Royal Irish Flax Society, in referring to his endeavours to cultivate flax on his home-farm as well as upon those of his tenantry in the south of Ireland, said,

"He had been induced, more to restore the growth of flax in that part of Ireland than to introduce it, as the cultivation had ceased on account of the want of markets for the produce. His tenants, too, were induced to join in the cause, as well as Lord Devon and other influential landowners of the district. They all succeeded, grew good flax, and the specimens received the favourable notice of the Flax Society, his lordship's being valued at £63 only at that time on account of the lowness of prices, but which would now fetch £100. His tenants did not, however, succeed so well as himself; they could not transport the flax in its bulk, they had no water power, and he was unwilling to erect steam-power till assured of a market; the consequence was, that he had to take all the flax off the hands of his tenants, so that at that time he had more stacks of flax than of wheat on his farm, with no means of turning them to account."

Several other growers of flax in England made similar complaints. Mr. Hammond of Norfolk, said, that not finding any market, he had thatched several of his cottages with the straw, and a more beautiful thatch he never saw. Mr. Fuller, M.P., had also grown flax in Sussex, but had "no better success in getting it off his hands; and when he offered it to a large manufacturing house, he was told they could only give him linen in return for it." At a subsequent meeting of the Agricultural Society, on the 12th of March, Mr. Fuller laid before it his balance sheet of the cultivation of flax, from which it appears that he had succeeded in selling his flax in the straw—the produce of one acre—for £3; and that his profits, upon the one acre, was £8 6s. 0d. The value of the seed alone—24 bushels, at 8s. a bushel—was £9. 12s. 0d. Mr. Shelly also stated that in Sussex it could not be turned into money; there was no difficulty in farmers growing flax, the only difficulty being to get a market for it; if it could be made a marketable article, there would be no want of growers.

*This machine may be seen at 26, Gresham-st., London.