

Assuming that the flax has been dried, there are various methods in use for removing the seed. One of these is "rippling," which consists in pulling handfuls of flax over and between iron teeth placed close enough to pull off the capsules (fig. 7). The teeth of the rippling comb should be round in section and the spaces between should be about three-sixteenths of an inch. The capsules are afterwards crushed on the floor by a wooden mallet, or by a roller drawn over them, and the seeds can be separated by a fanning mill.

The capsules may be crushed without rippling by placing the bundle on a stout board on the floor and pounding it with a mallet. But, if the bundles have been carelessly tied, rippling has the advantage of enabling the operator to even the ends and remove weeds before tying up again. Another method is to pass the handful of flax between smooth rollers pressed together by springs. The crushed capsules are then passed through a fanning mill. There is a threshing machine in use in eastern



FIG. 7.—Apparatus for rippling.

Michigan which, it is claimed, keeps the ends straight, and afterwards binds the flax again into bundles. This machine is said to thresh 15 tons of flax straw a day. Whatever type of machine is employed, care must be taken to avoid crushing or injuring the flax straw. After removing the capsules, the straw should be tied into moderately loose bundles of about the same size as before. Any weeds that are noticed in the sheaves during the threshing should be removed, and the ends of the bundles should be squared before tying up. Flax screenings are sometimes used for feeding purposes, but should be employed for this purpose in small quantities only, as there are several records of cattle and sheep being poisoned by eating them.

As flax seeds are liable to absorb moisture readily, if kept in a damp state, and to heat in consequence, it is much easier to keep them dry if allowed to remain in the seed-bolls as long as possible. It is very important that sacks of cleaned flax seed should be stored in a dry, airy place. The dried flax straw must also be kept dry until the time for retting arrives. If allowed to become damp, moulds will develop and the fibre will be seriously injured.

RETTING OR STEEPING.

The object of retting is to bring about certain chemical changes in the flax stem so that the fibres may be readily separated from the shives. It is really the first stage in the manufacture of flax, and it is open to question whether this operation should be carried out by the farmer, or should be undertaken, together with the next stages of breaking and scutching, by the flax manufacturer.