

Mr. J. L. Coster.
20th July, 1882.

about thirty ships a year besides our own. I may also state that we are increasing our fleet. The amount of our capital has been increased, and in what we do we shall be guided by circumstances, and the requirements of the country. We propose to have more sailing vessels, and to supplement the fleet by suitable steamers.

23. *The Chairman.*] It is your intention, then, to reduce the number of chartered vessels?—Yes; as our own fleet increases.

24. What number of vessels are you likely to have of your own in twelve months?—I do not think there will be a large increase by that time. Vessels take a long time to build.

25. You now have seventeen vessels of your own, and charter from twenty to thirty vessels a year?—Yes.

26. Are we to understand that the policy of the Company is to do away with chartering?—Yes; to some extent.

27. Do you carry lads as apprentices?—Yes; it has been part of the policy of the Company from the commencement to take on board our vessels respectable lads of good character, to train them as apprentices, teaching them navigation, with a view to their becoming officers, and creating what I may call a mercantile officer marine of our own. So far, this plan has been attended with a great measure of success, and, although it is only nine years since the Company was projected, we have several second officers who joined us as boys. I do not think we have a chief officer yet, but I have no doubt this will speedily come. We have at present about sixty lads on our ships, besides second and third officers who joined us as boys. We have some very smart young officers who have been boys in various parts of the colony.

28. *Mr. Peacock.*] There is one important point to which I should like to draw attention. Mr. Coster has stated that the Company has encouraged, as far as possible, the training of boys to fill the position of officers of the vessels. I think we are more interested in the training of boys to make them ordinary seamen. How many boys have been taken on board the Company's vessels with this view? We want to turn out good ordinary able-bodied seamen.

29. *Mr. W. J. Hurst.*] I should like to supplement the remarks just made. Mr. Coster tells us that the Company take boys, as midshipmen of the better class, for the purpose of training them and making them officers. My object is to provide for young people whose parents have gone away and left them in a destitute condition. I want to make these lads seamen.

30. *The Chairman.*] It will be much better to let the witness finish his own story. You say, Mr. Coster, that your vessels carry about sixty of these lads. This, of course, refers to vessels owned by the Company?—Yes.

31. From the class to which these lads belong, it is generally expected that they will take a higher position than that of ordinary able seamen?—Eventually. The boys are taken quite irrespective of the social position of their parents. If they are good boys, and likely to take to the profession, we invariably endeavor to provide for them. We have gentlemen's sons, and sons of people in a good position, and we have also officers who are the sons of seafaring men, turning out splendidly. It has not been a question of social position, so long as the boys are respectable. The only thing the Company is particular about is the respectability of the boys. Some of them will make officers and some will not; that rests with the lads themselves.

32. I am sure the Committee are pleased to hear what has been done. You are aware that Naval Training Schools are mainly composed of lads of two classes, one being the criminal class, and the other the unfortunate class of lads whose parents have left them, and perhaps gone to other colonies. Now, do you not think that provision might be made for utilising one section of these boys on board vessels sailing out of the colony?—I hardly think so until they are fit to ship as A.B.'s or ordinary seamen. There are also other reasons.

33. I am assuming that the lads have left the Naval Training School, where they have been taught the use of the ropes. Would there not be an opening on vessels belonging to a large Company for a number of these lads?—Distinctly so, but the chief trouble arises in this way. The crews of the vessels are shipped in London for the round voyage. In all cases, however, or nearly all, several hands have to be shipped in the colony.

34. Would you think it an unfair interference with the Company if the law made it compulsory for vessels over a certain tonnage leaving the colony to carry a certain number of colonial apprentices, trained, and of good character?

35. *Mr. W. J. Hurst.*] Do you mean apprentices?

36. *The Chairman.*] Yes; I am speaking now of the class to whom I have been directing my questions. I am not talking of those whom the Company have taken of their own accord, but of a class of people of a non-criminal kind who go to our Training Schools. I ask if Mr. Coster will think it unfair if we make it compulsory for vessels leaving this colony to carry a certain number of colonial apprentices, according to their tonnage?—I think it would be a hardship, and for these reasons, among others. There is a grave responsibility attached to these apprentices—a responsibility which, speaking for myself personally, would be felt very strongly by our own Company. Not only these but there is attached to the proposition a large measure of expense. In our own case we have a special home provided for our own boys in London. This home is maintained at a very considerable cost to the Company, and takes a great deal of careful attention. If all owners were bound to take these boys, including, I presume, owners whose vessels might be trading to all parts of the world, I think such a compulsory provision as that referred to would have a very detrimental effect.

37. Will you explain why that which your Company voluntarily do, might not be made compulsory upon other people, who do not do it?—The chief reason is the grave responsibility and expense which, in the case of our Company have been voluntarily undertaken. Although we do not profess to be philanthropic, our Company does not look absolutely to the utmost farthing which it can make out of its trade, but regards itself as a valuable national institution, having other ends in view than the mere making of money.