

545. That is, to pay on the gross weight instead of the screened coal?—Yes. There had been a prior request of a similar nature to this, and on the 8th December, 1888, we concluded an arbitration on the question. I now put in a copy of the report of the committee of accountants appointed by the Grey Valley Miners' Association on the one part and the Grey Valley Coal Company on the other part, to ascertain the gross output from the Brunner, Wallsend, and Coal-pit Heath Mines from the 3rd September to the 27th October, both inclusive, and to ascertain what price would have been paid to miners per ton had the gross-weight system been in operation during the said period. [Exhibit No. 5.]

546. Was this disputed or referred to the umpire?—No; the Committee agreed.

547. Some of these were miners?—Yes, three of them, and three were acting on behalf of the proprietors.

548. Did the men go back to work cheerfully after that?—They refused to accept the report of the arbitration, though the management was quite willing to do so. The miners then withdrew their application.

549. I presume, then, it was in consequence of an application that the report was made?—Yes. A similar application was made on the 24th February of this year. I will read the application:—

From the Amalgamated Miners' and Labourers' Association of New Zealand, Brunnerton.—To Mr. James Bishop, Mine-manager.—SIR,—As you were informed some months ago, the miners in your employ are very much dissatisfied with the present system of weighing the coal on which payment is made to the hewers. They are convinced that the only just system that can be adopted is payment by gross weight, and they are pretty well tired of the Billy Fairplay lottery plan now in operation. I am directed to give you notice that on and after fourteen days from date the miners demand payment on the gross weight of the coal sent to bank, and at the rates of 2s. 10d. per ton, both on bord and pillar work. Hoping that you will accede to this, I remain, &c., SAMUEL ANDREW, Secretary.

550. Did you answer that letter?—Yes, on the same day.

551. Tell us generally what you did?—We proposed to go to arbitration as formerly, in order to determine the price; and then further correspondence ensued. I wrote as follows:—

Brunner Mines, 24th February, 1890.—Hewing-prices.—DEAR SIR,—Your favour informing me of the dissatisfaction of the miners with the present weighing system, and notice that in fourteen days from date they demand a change of system, together with a hewing-price of 2s. 10d. per ton, came to hand in due course, and in reply I may be allowed to say that, so far as negotiations for a change of system, &c., have been considered between ourselves and the workmen, it has always been on the basis of paying for gross weight such price per ton as would be equivalent to 4s. on screened coal; and, as you well know, the prices required were ascertained by arbitrators representing both sides, but, for some reason best known to your members, were rejected by them. At present there is nothing to justify the demand for the increase of price indicated in your present notification, but in order to come to an equitable settlement we are prepared to proceed with a new arbitration on the basis of that formerly carried out. Hoping this will meet the views of the general body of the men, I am, &c., JAMES BISHOP.—Mr. S. Andrew, Secretary.

On the 3rd March there was another letter from Mr. Andrew, the Secretary, as follows:—

DEAR SIR,—Your letter relative to the gross-weight question was laid before a general meeting on Saturday evening last. It was decided to adhere to the former resolution, of which you had notice on the 24th February. The miners wish to have an idle day not later than Thursday, in order to take a ballot as provided by rule 25. If it will be inconvenient to lay all the mines idle, I have to request you to lay Coal-pit Heath and Brunner off on the back shift, and give Wallsend a 6-o'clock start on Thursday, if no previous opportunity is afforded to hold a general meeting.—Yours truly, SAMUEL ANDREW, Secretary.

552. What did you reply to that?—As follows:—

Brunner, 3rd March, 1890.—Mr. Samuel Andrew, Secretary, Grey Valley Coal-miners' Association.—DEAR SIR,—I am in receipt of your favour of this date, informing me that a general meeting of your members had decided to adhere to a former resolution demanding 2s. 10d. a ton gross weight. In reply, I can only express regret, and may be allowed to renew my former offer—viz., to arbitrate on the question. Or, as an alternative, I am prepared to give effect to the principle of paying on the gross weight on the basis of prices already ascertained, and, if found unsatisfactory after three months' trial, we may proceed to arbitrate and ascertain what further advance of price, if any, is necessary. Hoping that the members of your Association will be found ready to adopt the principle of arbitration, in order to overcome what otherwise may prove injurious to all concerned, I am, &c., JAMES BISHOP.

3rd March, 1890.—Mr. Samuel Andrew, Secretary, Miners' Union.—Re ballot.—DEAR SIR,—I cannot see any reason why this cannot be accomplished without making idle time. It seems to me that the ballot of the Coal-pit Heath and Brunner Mines can easily be taken in changing-time. Hoping this suggestion will meet with your approval, I am, &c., JAMES BISHOP.

553. Was the idle day granted?—Yes. Then, on the 4th March they wrote again the following letter:—

Mr. J. Bishop, Mine-manager.—DEAR SIR,—The means you suggest for taking the ballot would not do at all, inasmuch as the rule provides that this must be done at a meeting called for the purpose. As far as I can see it is only a form to be gone through, which will not affect the question at issue in any way. Notice has been given the company as to the intention of the miners if the gross-weight price asked for is not agreed to, and it is of no consequence really whether the ballot is taken or not, only that such a step as that contemplated may be done according to the rule. In regard to the prices said to have been ascertained by arbitrators previously on the gross-weight question, I am sure they can never become acceptable. The question, from the miners' point of view, is 4s. per ton for screened coal, or 2s. 11d. per ton gross weight, and any intermediate price can find no supporters. It is difficult to understand why the company has not already acceded to the very reasonable request of the miners. All that is asked for is that the mineral shall be weighed in a more satisfactory manner, and according to the law, and paid for at an established rate per ton. I was instructed to call a general meeting not later than Thursday, but before deciding on what time or day it was necessary to consult you, according to previous agreement, in this matter. If you have decided to give the 2s. 10d. per ton, of course the general meeting will not be needed, and I should like to receive your answer before posting the notices.—Yours truly, S. ANDREW, Secretary.

554. What did you reply to that?—

Brunner Mine, 5th March, 1890.—Mr. Samuel Andrew, Secretary, Grey Valley Coal-miners' Association.—DEAR SIR,—I am in receipt of your favour of yesterday's date, wherein you point out that taking the ballot is a mere matter of form to be gone through in accordance with a rule of your Association. As regards this, I have no objection to your forms being carried out so long as your doing so does not cause loss of trade, which would be detrimental to all. And it was in order to avoid such that my suggestion was made, and which I regret cannot be given effect to. At present, so far as can be seen, Friday afternoon will suit us best to lay Brunner and Coal-pit Heath off, and shall be glad to know this afternoon if this arrangement will suit you. Coming to the question of price to be paid for hewing on the gross weight, you say the prices already ascertained will not become acceptable, and that, from the miners' point of view, 2s. 10d. per ton gross weight is equivalent to the 4s. per ton now paid for screened coal; and, further, you say it is difficult to understand why the company have not already acceded to the very reasonable request