

of the miners. In reply to this part of your letter, I have to say that the only reason why the company have not acceded to your request to pay 2s. 10d. per ton is found in the fact that the price named is a large advance on the price now paid for screened coal. As regards the change of system, the company cannot reasonably be held accountable for not giving effect to this, the delay having been caused by the miners themselves. And now I may be allowed to repeat that the company are quite ready to give effect to the gross-weight system, the price to be paid to be ascertained by arbitrators representing both sides. Regretting there should be any difference of opinion, I am, &c., JAMES BISHOP.

Then, on the 5th March another letter was received :—

Brunnerton, 5th March, 1890.—Mr. J. Bishop, Mine-manager.—DEAR SIR,—I regret that your answer is not satisfactory, and that there should be any need for taking the ballot. The reasons you give as to Friday being more suitable for the trade to lay Coal-pit Heath and Brunner back shifts off will justify the officers of the union in delaying the matter until then. Will you please give Wallsend a 6-o'clock start on Friday morning. The meeting will take place at 4 o'clock; therefore the miners will not be able to work later than 2 o'clock. Hoping yet to receive a favourable answer, I remain, &c., SAMUEL ANDREW, Secretary.

I replied to that on the 7th March :—

Brunner, 7th March, 1890.—Mr. Samuel Andrew, Secretary, Grey Valley Coal-miners' Association.—DEAR SIR,—In further reference to your favour of the 4th, and more especially your remarks expressing surprise that the demand of the miners has not already been conceded, I may be allowed to say that the demand made does not come before the company as a reasonable one, but rather as an attempt to compel them to pay the rate obtaining at Westport without any good reason being put forward in support of the demand. On the other hand, there are several reasons why the company cannot reasonably be expected to pay the same price as Westport. 1st. It cannot be said that 2s. 10d. is a district rate, as Westport and Greymouth cannot be taken as one district. 2nd. The largest proportion of the output of Westport mines commands 2s. a ton more than the produce of the Grey Valley Mines. 3rd. The Grey Valley Coal Company cannot pay the large increase you demand and compete in the coal trade of the colony, and any attempt to compel them to do so can only result in injury to all concerned. 4th. The demand made is not warranted by the wages now current in the several mines of the company, for, while the all-round earnings of the workmen are good, the company have no margin of profit. Notwithstanding the reasons above named, the directors are ready to sanction arbitration being resorted to, and they will spare no effort to effect an amicable and equitable settlement; and, should you so desire, they will be prepared to meet your representatives in conference to-morrow. I may just add that the continued uncertainty caused by the action of the miners in these matters has a bad effect all round, as customers of the company are already drawing supplies from other sources, thus causing unnecessary loss. Hoping you will bring this before your members, I am, &c., JAMES BISHOP.

The next letter from them is on the 7th March :—

Mr. James Bishop, Mine-manager.—DEAR SIR,—Your communications on the gross-weight question were laid before the general meeting this evening, after which the ballot was taken, and it was decided by a very large majority that unless the 2s. 10d. per ton gross weight was conceded the tools will be brought out and work will cease on Saturday (to-morrow).—Yours truly, SAMUEL ANDREW, Secretary.

My reply to that on the 7th March was as follows :—

Brunner, 7th March, 1890.—Mr. Samuel Andrew, Secretary, Grey Valley Coal-miners' Association.—DEAR SIR,—I regret the decision of your members as conveyed to me by your note of this evening, and in further reference to the question of payment under the gross-weight system I may say again that the directors of this company are prepared to make every effort to effect an amicable and equitable settlement; and in order that some chance of this may be afforded them I have to request that your members will delay taking out their tools—always an undesirable step—until the directors have had a chance of meeting your representatives. This cannot possibly be before 2.30 p.m. to-morrow, about which time they will arrive here. Hoping this may meet your approval, I am, &c., JAMES BISHOP. —Any reply you may have to give will reach me early to-morrow morning if left at Brunner office.

On the 8th March there was another letter from Mr. Andrew to myself. This is the letter :—

Mr. J. Bishop, Mine-manager.—DEAR SIR,—In deference to your request the miners will not bring out their tools to-day. Representatives of the union will be prepared to meet the directors at 3 p.m., or later if more convenient. If you consider this course advisable will you please reply. I am not working to-day, and will attend to it.—Yours truly, SAMUEL ANDREW, Secretary.

Well, I had asked for the delay because I knew that the directors were coming from Dunedin.

555. What reply did you make?—

Wallsend, 8th March, 1890.—Mr. Samuel Andrew, Secretary, Grey Valley Coal-miners' Association.—DEAR SIR,—With the desire to effect a settlement of the present difficulty in connection with the payment for coal-hewing under the gross-weight system, I have to submit the undermentioned list of hewing-prices which the company are willing should be paid :—Coal-pit Heath : Whole coal, 2s. 10d. a ton; pillars, 2s. 8d. a ton. Wallsend : Whole coal, 2s. 8d. a ton; pillars, 2s. 6d. a ton. Brunner : Whole coal, 2s. 8d. a ton; pillars, 2s. 4d. a ton. All loose coal requiring to be filled away, also taking down top coal which may have been left, to be paid at the pillar rates, except in case of special difficulty, when extra may be allowed. In making this offer we do so believing the rates named are fair, and in the event of the miners so wishing, arbitration may be conducted during such period of trial as may be mutually agreed upon. I think we are right in saying that the change of system will cause the company a very considerable extra cost in working, amounting to some hundreds a year on the three mines. At the same time there is no desire on the part of the company to have the miners working at unreasonable or inadequate rates of pay; and in making the offer as herein set forth the company are confident that very liberal pay can be earned. As regards the figures named in the case of Coal-pit Heath Mine—viz., 2s. 10d. and 2s. 8d.—I may say that the pillars being worked at present may for all practical purposes be regarded as "whole coal," and the pillar rate need not come into immediate operation except in case of felling loose coal, but as the pillars become crushed, thus causing a large amount of slack, with a corresponding advantage to the hewers, the pillar price would then be applicable. As regards Wallsend, the coal now being got in this mine partakes more of the character of pillar workings than whole coal, hence the lower hewing-price as compared with Coal-pit Heath. For pillar workings in this mine it is scarcely necessary to provide, as these are not likely to be worked for some years. Brunner, you will see from the figures supplied you this afternoon, and which show in a practical way the effect the change of system would have, that the price now offered is a very liberal one for pillars as now being worked; and as regards the whole coal in this mine it is unfortunately not workable at present, but from past experience the price offered should prove ample. In further reference to tests made by me this afternoon, I may point out that these tests were not made with the view of binding the miners in any way, but simply to test the working of the system, and further tests can be taken at the respective mines, extending over a time to be mutually agreed upon. In starting work under the change of system it will be understood by your members that we can only weigh one truck from each pair of miners as in the past, but if the system is given effect to no time will be lost in procuring the necessary machines to weigh each truck as brought out of the mines. In conclusion allow me to suggest that your members resume work at once on the basis of figures as given above, and during a period to be agreed upon more exhaustive tests may be carried out, with the object of proving whether the figures now submitted are correct or otherwise, and if found inadequate the company bind themselves to pay such increase as the parties representing both sides may find necessary. Hoping you will lay this before your meeting, and that the result will be a resumption of work, I am, &c., JAMES BISHOP, of Grey Valley Coal Company.

Wallsend, 10th March, 1890.—Mr. Samuel Andrew, Secretary, Grey Valley Coal-miners' Association.—Re gross weight.—DEAR SIR,—I may be allowed to supplement what I have already written you on this subject, more especially