

as regards Brunner and Wallsend. In the case of the former, if you will take the figures supplied you on Saturday, and average the screened-coal trucks, you will find the average value per truck to be about 1s. 2d. Taking the trucks tested for gross weight, and treating them in the same way, the value per truck is about 1s. 8d., or an increase of 40 per cent. This I maintain the company cannot pay, seeing that the increased value to the miner is largely made up by slack, the greater portion of which has to be run into the river. Wallsend: In connection with this mine there are ten places which we are fairly entitled to treat as being specially advantageous to the miner, and in which the two-and-eightpenny rate should take effect, the other places being paid at 2s. 10d. Should your meeting so wish, I shall be glad to confer with your representatives this afternoon. Trusting you will read this together with my letter of Saturday, I am, &c., J. BISHOP.—P.S.: As a proof that there need be no question of wages in dispute, I am prepared to guarantee the average miner 14s. a day at the pillars in the Brunner Mine, and at the price offered they can earn more.

Then, on the 10th March the following letter was received:—

Mr. J. Bishop, Mine-manager.—DEAR SIR,—The same deputation as met you on Saturday, with the addition of Mr. Newton, has been appointed to wait on you this afternoon. I am unable to propose a time just now, but will write or see you later in the day.—Yours truly, SAMUEL ANDREW, Secretary.

On the same day we received the reply of the Miners' Association, accepting this offer:—

10th March, 1890.—Mr. J. Bishop, Mine-manager.—DEAR SIR,—Your offer to pay 2s. 10d. per ton gross weight for Coal-pit Heath and Wallsend Mines, and 14s. a day for Brunner miners, has been accepted. Inasmuch as a uniform tonnage price has been sought, the Brunner agreement is accepted under protest. The miners will be ready to commence work to-morrow.—Yours truly, SAMUEL ANDREW, Secretary.

Brunner, 20th March, 1890.—Mr. Samuel Andrew, Secretary, Grey Valley Coal-miners' Association.—*Re* starting new hands.—DEAR SIR,—I fail to understand the meaning of your memo. *re* above, but, so far, I presume it relates to the miners working on wages in the Brunner Mine. In reply to your memo. I may explain that my position in the matter of starting new hands is to refrain from doing so until the demand for coal warrants my putting on men sufficient to meet the demand. The time for this action has now arrived, as may be proved by vessels having to remain in port waiting for cargo, and others, which should have loaded at Greymouth, have had to go to Westport. In addition, the machinery at the mines is not kept going. In conclusion, so long as my setting on new hands does not injure those now employed, I cannot delay taking steps to meet the requirements of the company's trade: for me to do so means lasting injury to all concerned. As you are aware, if we fail to supply vessels, other producers will. Hoping this explanation will prove satisfactory, I am, &c., J. BISHOP.

The reason of our giving way on that 2s. 10d. per ton was that we could not help ourselves: we had contracts, and could not allow the mines to stand. We would rather pay 14s. a day than give them 2s. 10d. a ton.

556. Why?—Because they could earn £1 5s. a day in the Brunner at 2s. 10d., the coal was so very much easier to get. There was a little whole coal, but not much, and the bulk of it was pillars.

557. Why do you mention the pillars?—That is because in pillar coal there is no powder to use, for one thing, and there is no cost of that kind; and being somewhat crushed, it does not require the same amount of labour—there is no cutting; it is tender.

558. Then, they only worked a fortnight at the 14s., and they made you an offer to go on at 2s. 6d.?—The arrangement as applied to the Brunner only lasted a fortnight at the 14s. a day, and then they went to work at 2s. 6d. a ton, and at these prices we continued to work until the present difficulty cropped up.

559. When was that?—They continued to work up to June. As I remarked, they were working under protest at the 14s.

560. And after you granted 2s. 6d. per ton for Brunner working, did you ever go back to the 14s. per day?—The protest was never revived.

561. So that, until what you call the present trouble, which began in June, the mine was worked on those terms?—Yes.

562. Was there any difference of opinion during that period, or irritation on either side?—We found that the prices then ruling in all the mines were too high, especially in the Coal-pit Heath and Brunner, where it was all pillar-workings practically, and it led up to our serving the miners with a notice for a reduction.

563. That is, you found, from experience in the returns you were getting, that you were working at a loss?—Yes.

564. Can you put in any letters you have about that?—Some time about the 27th June we had an interview with them on the subject we were about to approach them on. Mr. Kennedy came down from Wellington, and called a deputation of them together, and explained the position of affairs to them, the position the company was in, and to deal with the whole question of prices. They afterwards laid these proposals before a general meeting of themselves; and the following is a letter written subsequent to that meeting, giving them notice of the reduction we wished them to accept—viz.:—

Brunnerton, 30th June, 1890.—To Mr. S. Andrew, Secretary, Grey Valley Miners' Association.—DEAR SIR,—I regret to notice that your Association meeting of Saturday last evidently treated the company's application for revision of rates and alternative proposals very lightly. Admitting the right of your Association to have ample time for discussion of the subject, I trust they will recognise the injustice of expecting this company to bear the heavy loss disclosed week after week, pending settlement. Without prejudice to a settlement on the lines of Mr. Kennedy's letter of Friday last, and to afford ample time for discussion, I have to ask your Association to make the following concession during the interval—viz.: to allow 20 per cent. off all hewing rates. In making this request, I am fully aware that the hewers are quite able to do this without the fear of their earnings falling below what must be considered fair pay. Failing acceptance of this proposal, or some other equitable adjustment being made meantime, I am reluctantly compelled to give you the following notice: "That the collieries cease work on and after Monday next." Relying on your Association being as fully impressed as we are of the irreparable loss to all interests and the distress which would arise by the closing of the collieries, especially were the stoppage prolonged, and recognising that lock-outs and strikes should only take place after all reasonable means were exhausted, and as the same means exist for an amicable adjustment before as after stoppage, we invite you (failing an early adjustment between ourselves) to agree to refer the question in dispute to arbitration. As bearing on the question, I may mention that, after much negotiation, we succeeded in obtaining the offer of the coal supply to Auckland Gas Company and Onehunga Ironworks, upwards of 15,000 tons, but have been obliged to decline them.—Yours faithfully, JAMES BISHOP, Manager.

The matter was then adjourned for seven days.