

Well, whether there was any written or unwritten law to that effect, it has been understood by the men that membership of the benefit society carried with it priority of employment. And there are a good few men employed at the present time by the company who are members of other benefit societies who have concealed that fact from the Union Company, because they thought that the members of the Union Company's benefit society would get employment in preference to themselves. I say most emphatically that that is the opinion that prevails amongst the men. They are always referring to this society in what you might call "unbecoming" terms. They look upon it with contempt; and I do not want the reporters to publish this, but I am told that in the Union Company's service the name by which it is commonly known is the "Deaf-and-dumb Society."

9. You might have heard of the celebrated letter which was written concerning Dorling, and his dismissal from the "Grafton." Mr. Grater, the secretary, told us yesterday in the course of his examination that he had no idea that Dorling was a member of the Druids or any other society. Dorling was always reported, both on the purser's returns to witness and also on the official returns of the chief officers, as belonging to no other society. Now, what is your idea why Dorling should have concealed the fact that he belonged to another society? Do you consider the reason was that he suppressed the fact of belonging to another society in the hope that he would not be debarred from joining the Union Company's society?—Yes; so that his employment would not be endangered.

10. Can you conceive it as a reasonable explanation?—Yes; it is a reasonable explanation. And, as I stated before, there are men, whose names I will not mention, who belong to other benefit societies, and who have concealed that fact because they thought that by belonging to the Union Company's society they would have a better chance of employment. But, so far as Mr. Grater's explanation is concerned, it appears to me to be a very lame one indeed, because I can hardly conceive that a man holding the position he does in connection with the benefit society, not being an employé of the Union Company in any shape or form, and not fortified by some written or unwritten instructions in connection with the matter, could possibly, even supposing the letter was written hurriedly, have taken it upon himself to say the man should be dismissed.

11. *Mr. Fisher.*] Do you, then, consider one effect of the existence of this private benefit society is to transform the men into hypocrites?—It has done so, in my opinion. Keeping to the point in reference to compulsion, I was only told yesterday of an incident that occurred in connection with the "Omapere," and this is another case where the Union Company's officials have gone unduly out of their way, if they have not received instructions, in order to see that the membership of the society was enforced. Now, I cannot vouch for this; I got it second-hand from somebody else; but it is to this effect: that the purser of the "Omapere," at the inception of this society, asked the crew of that vessel to join the benefit society, and they refused to do so; and he absolutely refused, so I am given to understand, to pay the men their wages until they were prepared to hand over their contributions to the society to him. That statement was given to me by a person of some standing in the community, whose word I have no reason to doubt whatever. I accept it as it was given to me. If it is wrong I am quite prepared to withdraw it. There is not the slightest doubt but that there must be some misunderstanding among these Union Company's servants that the payments to this benefit society must be enforced, for I have been informed that in half a dozen vessels the pursers deduct the contributions to the benefit society from the wages before handing them over. That has occurred in the "Flora" and "Brunner," and I am also given to understand that it has occurred in the "Mararoa" and "Manapouri." There is little or no difference, however, between the purser stopping the money from a man's wages before he hands them over and standing outside the door when the man has got his money and hitting him on the head—figuratively speaking—with a bludgeon and making him pay it then. Of course, by bludgeon I mean the pressure applied by the Union Company. But, coming again to the question of compulsion, here is another case which, although not altogether settled yet, I think I am perfectly justified in bringing before you, to show that pressure is even being brought to bear now by Union Company's officials to compel men to join. I received a letter from our Wellington secretary a short time ago informing me that men were still being forced to join. I may here state that we have been arranging an agreement with the Union Company, reference to which you will no doubt have noticed, providing that the joining of the benefit society is to be optional when the men join the service. Well, that agreement was signed on behalf of the Seamen's Union yesterday, and, I believe, on behalf of the Union Company to-day. When this communication was received from our secretary at Wellington I was instructed to draw the Union Company's attention to the fact that their men were still being compelled to join the benefit society, and I remonstrated with the company, seeing that negotiations were pending for the stopping of this compulsion. The Union Company wrote and forwarded me a copy of telegrams that had passed between them and their agent, in which they practically denied that anything of the sort had been done. They were very eager to find out if this was the case, and the secretary of the company waited upon me the other day and asked for particulars. I got the particulars from our Wellington secretary by wire, and this is what he says: "W. Belcher, Secretary, Seamen's Union, Dunedin.—Arbitration case sitting all day. Adjourned till to-morrow. Pat McCarthy and James Quinn, firemen, 'Mawhera,' told they must join or leave ship by purser. Particulars mailed.—W. JONES, Wellington." Now, I only received this telegram on the 17th of this month, and I think this most clearly shows that, if there are no written instructions, there are some secret instructions issued to these officials of the company right throughout the fleet to say that the men are compelled to join the benefit society.

12. Is that all at present of a private nature that you wish to deal with?—Yes. Here is a document that is commonly known as a "round-robin." It was sent round the boats during the time that Mr. Millar was the secretary of the Seamen's Union. There are no dates on it, unfortunately, but I could easily find out from our records when the thing was issued. It