

115. I only mention that to show that even this inquiry is not original in that sense?—I may say that I am glad, so far as our society is concerned, to see it inquired into in every possible way. I am quite satisfied it will result to our advantage. I see by the papers that you gentlemen are apparently very antagonistic to the society.

116. *Hon. Major Steward.*] Oh, no?—At any rate, if I mistake not the temper of the men I have spoken to—and I have conversed freely with them—the evidence to be laid before you will show that a great many of the men will be sorry if the society is done away with—the married men especially. They have a doctor at every port they go to, and they have medicine supplied to them. There is some talk at present about the doctors accepting the work for small payment, but I think they will still carry it on, and it will be to the men's advantage.

117. *Mr. Fisher.*] What is difficult to understand is this: A witness—I am speaking in the indefinite sense—gives us evidence to a certain point, and then asks that his name may not appear in the paper, and then he gives totally different evidence when he thinks his tongue is free?—I should say that a man of that kind is giving evidence that is not worth much. An honest outspoken fellow will give true evidence, and his employers will think all the more of him. Instead of visiting punishment upon him they will be rather glad to see that they have an independent fellow in their service, as long as he is a good workman.

118. *The Chairman.*] I might say that any dislike to private societies that might exist in my mind is entirely on account of the principle of the thing. An employer says: "If you work for me I will deduct 6d.," and if that is allowed another might deduct 1s., and another 2s., and so on, and where is the principle to stop?—Well, if you take any Government scheme in force in the way of pensions, or help from the State, you will see it is all compulsion. The men would not pay unless they were compelled.

119. But in the Government case there is the consensus of opinion of the whole country, and here it rests on the philanthropy or greed or whim of the employer, and in some cases the employer might be a harsh, grinding man?—I do not know. I think if he is a harsh, grinding man he would soon find himself with the worst of the workmen on his hands, and the good workmen would drift away to the places where they were well used. That would be the result of that sort of thing.

120. Is there anything else, Mr. McLean, that you would like to mention?—No. If I see anything further in the evidence I may ask to come before you again.

*Hon. Major Steward:* I would like to say that my object has been to ascertain the real facts of the case. I came here with no prejudged opinion at all.

*Mr. McLean:* If the Commission wish to examine any of the company's men the company will give every assistance. Instructions have been given that any man asked for by the Commission is to be relieved in order to appear.

WEDNESDAY, 26TH MAY, 1897.

JOHN KIRBY was examined on oath.

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your business?—I am shipping officer for the Union Steamship Company.

2. How long have you been in the Union Company's service?—About six years and a half.

3. Do you belong to the benefit society?—Yes.

4. How long have you been in the society?—I have been an ordinary member from the time it was inaugurated in 1891, and also a member of the provisional committee and working or ordinary member of the society from November, 1893.

5. You are not on the committee now?—No.

6. *Mr. Fisher.*] Your time is wholly employed in the service of the Union Company?—Yes; my whole time is employed in the service of the Union Company. Besides employing and discharging all labour, making out all agreements between masters and crews, I attend the Custom-house, and inspect all fire and boat appliances, and in the absence of the marine superintendent I am present at all fire- and boat-drills. My whole time is not taken up in the employing of men, but I am wholly and solely employed by the Union Company.

7. *The Chairman.*] You have seen the evidence as it has been printed?—Yes.

8. So far as I can see, the papers have printed an extremely correct account of all the evidence that has been taken. Can you give us any fuller information than has already been given, or do you wish to refute any statements that have been made?—I wish to commence by refuting many statements that have been made—Mr. Belcher's, for instance, in reference to Samuels's case, where he makes a declaration on the 8th June, 1893, at Dunedin. Samuels says that the reason he was dismissed from the "Kawatiri" was that he was not a member of the Union Company's benefit society, although he was a member of the Oddfellows at the time. I wish to refute that charge, and to put in evidence, from the reports of the chief engineer of the ship at the time, showing the cause of the man's discharge [Exhibit 9]. You will see that any evidence I bring forward I am willing to substantiate. In the column higher up in the report you will notice that the man is shown as only "fair," and that his conduct is also "fair," but on the 9th June he makes a declaration—I think, before Mr. Belcher—that the reason he was discharged was that he would not join the Union Company's benefit society, and was not a member.

9. And he says, "My discharge shows no faults at all"?—Yes; and that was done to give him a chance of employment elsewhere. The report I have produced is a private report to the employers. A man must be very bad before he gets a bad discharge from the Union Company's service.

10. *Hon. Major Steward.*] He was not so bad that you wished to make public a report that would operate as a bar to his future employment?—No; but it let the employer know he was not a satisfactory employé.