

197. *Mr. Fisher.*] You are a member of the benefit society?—Yes.

198. And fifty-three years of age?—Yes.

199. And at present out of employment?—Yes.

200. Do you think the fact of belonging to the society gives you any priority of claim for employment as soon as a vacancy occurs?—No, I do not think so. I will get my chance the same as anybody else. There might be a vacancy where a younger man would be preferred.

201. I suppose you look upon the Union Company as your ultimate employment?—Yes; there is nothing else for me.

JABEZ HARMER was examined on oath.

202. *The Chairman.*] What is your business?—I am a butcher, late of the s.s. "Talune."

203. How long have you been in the benefit society?—Since 1893.

204. You think it would be better if it were registered?—Yes; although I have nothing to say about it. I was ill for five weeks, and got my benefit from the society.

205. What was the cause of your illness?—I poisoned my finger on the "Wakatipu."

206. You received a benefit from the society, but nothing from the Union Company?—I left the ship, and went on to the benefit society.

207. Your wages have been paid over?—No; as soon as I got better I joined another ship.

208. *Mr. Fisher.*] What is your opinion of the Bill introduced by the Government dealing with private benefit societies, if you understand its contents?—My opinion is that the benefit society would be better registered.

THOMAS ROBERTSON was examined on oath.

209. *The Chairman.*] What are you?—I am a baker, late of the s.s. "Talune."

209A. How long have you been in the Union Company's service?—Between fourteen and fifteen years.

210. How long have you been in the benefit society?—I never was in the society.

211. What friendly society do you belong to?—None whatever.

212. Were you ever asked to join?—Yes; but it was always a matter of neglect on my part that I did not join. It did not deprive me of my employment.

213. There seems to be some neglect on the part of the officers, because the rules say every man must belong either to the benefit society or to some friendly society?—I understand that.

214. How was it you were able to avoid the rules?—I do not know; I was always kept in employment.

215. There is some exceptional reason, because we have evidence that if men did not belong to a friendly society they must join the benefit society?—I understand that. It has always been owing to my own neglect that I am not in the society, and it would have been far better for me.

216. How old are you?—Thirty-four years.

217. Tell us your reason for not joining?—My own neglect.

218. You say you recognise it is a good thing?—Yes; and I think I should have been in it long ago. But it has never deprived me of work in my department.

219. I should like you to be very careful, because you must remember that Mr. Kirby has sworn that membership is absolutely compulsory in a case like yours?—I know it was compulsory, but perhaps they wanted a baker, and I was the only one knocking about, and they would take me. I am an old hand in the company.

GEORGE HILL was examined on oath.

220. *The Chairman.*] What is your business?—I am a butcher, late on the s.s. "Manapouri."

221. How long have you been in the Union Company's service?—Five years.

222. How long in the benefit society?—Eight months.

223. Do you belong to any other friendly society?—No.

224. What have you to tell us?—I think the society is right enough as it is. I have been in other friendly societies a few years ago, before I joined the Union Company, and that is my idea of it. I was in the Oddfellows. I ran out of them a few years ago in Melbourne. I think this society works just as well as I have seen the Oddfellows work. My idea of it is that it is just good enough. We get just as much; in fact, we get a little more, because if we are ashore for a couple of months we get that idle time thrown in to us when we go back. We do not have to pay any money for it. Of course, you do not get that concession in a friendly society.

225. Did we send for you?—I requested to be examined.

226. *Hon. Major Steward.*] Is there any suggestion you wish to make as to improving the society or its constitution in any way?—I do not think it could be improved in any way, so far as I can see.

227. You know it is an unregistered society?—Yes.

228. Do you or do you not think it would be an advantage to have it registered?—I think it would be as well as it is.

229. Why?—Because I think it works well enough as it is. We work it ourselves; we have the option as to what men we will put on the committee. Perhaps if the society were registered we would not have that power.

230. Why; if the rules were registered, would not that be the same thing?—If the rules were registered as at present existing.

231. Are you out of employment now?—I am waiting for a ship. I may be away in a day or two.

232. You have requested us to hear you: did anybody ask you to come?—No; some of them ran away with the idea of its being compulsory; but before I joined I got a job as soon as I do now.

233. You say it was not compulsory?—I was never compelled to join.