

205. Because it is to the benefit of employes who are not members of any other society?—Yes.

206. *Mr. Fisher.*] Being a member of the Oddfellows and a member of this benefit society, I take it, if you had to retire from one or the other, you would retire from the Oddfellows?—No; decidedly not.

DUNEDIN, MONDAY, 31ST MAY, 1897.

ALFRED HENRY BRIDGER was examined on oath.

1. *The Chairman.*] What are you by profession?—I am a warehouseman, and general manager of Sargood, Son, and Ewen's boot-factory.

2. There is, I believe, a private benefit society in connection with the works?—Yes; but the firm have no connection with it whatever.

3. Do they grant any subsidy?—No; they have nothing whatever to do with it. It is only called "Sargood's Benefit Society." If you read through these rules [Exhibit 15] you will see how it is carried on.

4. Can you give us any idea of the financial position of the society during these years from 1887 to 1897?—Well, you can hardly take it from that aspect, from the fact that the funds are divided every year.

5. You can state, perhaps, how much they have had to divide each year?—That, of course, all depends on the amount of sickness. For instance, one year there was an epidemic of influenza, and there was very little to divide at the end of that year. In other years, when there has been but little sickness, there has been a better dividend to each member. With the exception of £10, they do not carry anything forward.

6. *Hon. Major Steward.*] The funds have always been strong enough to meet all disbursements?—Oh, yes.

7. In regard to Rule 3: this appears to be an affair got up by the men quite independent of the employers?—Yes; the origin of it was really to stop subscription-lists.

8. I understand the employers have nothing whatever to do with it?—Nothing whatever.

9. How is Rule 3 enforced?—It is only the men's own method of doing it. They simply agreed amongst themselves to do this.

10. There is no penalty?—None whatever.

11. It does not involve their being dismissed?—Oh, dear, no.

12. Notwithstanding the rule, it is not compulsory?—No; but the men feel that they are in honour bound to pay their subscriptions and to belong to the society.

13. As a matter of fact, how many ever objected?—Only a few.

14. Are they still in the employ?—I could not say; that was some time ago. The matter was put before a meeting some five years ago, as to whether the society should proceed, and it was unanimously carried in the affirmative. There were only three votes against it.

15. Out of how many?—Out of a matter of three hundred employes.

16. Have those three persons continued in the employ of the firm?—The employment does not affect them in any way. It is simply a matter of convenience amongst themselves.

17. Any employe could refuse to join if he chose?—Certainly; it is only a question of his own honour in the matter.

18. Under Rule 12 there are apparently two trustees, and they are mentioned by name. Now, I presume these trustees are not elected for all time, but from time to time?—They are elected for all time as a matter of convenience, because there is no money involved. It is an honorary matter, and they are continued so long as they continue in the positions they hold. The committee is only elected from year to year.

19. *Mr. Fisher.*] Are they employers?—No; they are employes. Mr. Bone is sub-manager of the factory, and Mr. George is one of the employes. They are simply appointed by name as a matter of convenience. The society is controlled by the committee of seven.

20. How did the society originate?—As I said, to prevent subscription-lists, which were so numerous. When anybody fell sick it was always a case of sending the hat round.

21. Suppose all the members of the society were to say, "We do not want it any longer; we want to dissolve it"?—It would be dissolved; or a majority can dissolve it. The members simply control the society amongst themselves.

22. How are the contributions paid?—Well, we collect the subscriptions for them at their own request, to save the men any further trouble, when they are paid.

23. What is the method? Do they receive their wages less the contributions?—Yes.

24. Then, they are not paid their wages in full?—In full, in this way: It is done for their own convenience. The money is sent down in a lump-sum, and it is simply a question of going to their fund straight away.

25. Is this a fact: that a man, upon entering your employ, knows, as a matter of course, that he receives his wages less his contribution to the society?—Exactly. It is simply understood to be a matter of convenience.

26. *Hon. Major Steward.*] In the event of a man who did not wish to join the society entering your employ I suppose the cashier would pay him his wages in full?—Certainly; there is no compulsion anywhere.

27. Now, in the event of legislation being introduced by which all these societies—of course, these societies are under different rules—could be recognised, and supposing that it were possible for you to register with these rules and obtain legal recognition for them, would you see any objection to registration? It would probably only involve an annual report from the society to the Registrar of Friendly Societies setting forth a few details as to the number of members, the amount of contribution, and the amount to be divided, and so on. Is there any reason why the society should not be so