

75. Do you remember the formation of the benefit society?—It was just prior to my taking an interest in things. I do not remember the formation.

76. Now, taking the whole course of that time, do you consider this has been of benefit to the men?—Yes, most decidedly.

77. Has it been grumbled at by any of the men?—There were a few who grumbled occasionally, but very few. I could give you names—I myself, by supposing that we were compelled to join by the management. It was a misunderstanding. What compulsion did exist was brought about by a very large majority—in fact, an almost unanimous vote of the members themselves, that at their request the management should take some steps to make membership compulsory for the benefit of the whole.

78. Now, these men could have gained very nearly the same object by joining a friendly society?—As the society stands at present, that is so. Any one being a member of a friendly society is not required to be a member of our own benefit society.

79. Have you heard why, when other friendly societies were in existence, there was any reason to start a new one unless some distinct advantage was to be gained?—It is this way: In an office such as ours there are a lot of men careless and indifferent of their own interests, and it is necessary that some steps should be taken to make these men look after their own interests. It frequently occurred at the period covered at the formation of this society that these men required financial assistance, and, being unable to join other friendly societies because of their physical disabilities, the present society was started to meet such cases, and to prevent the necessity for subscription-lists going round, as well as to do away with that feeling of charity which always accompanies a subscription-list. This was the primary cause of the formation of the society, and has held it together up to the present day.

80. *Mr. Fisher.*] Those are the improvident and unthriftly; but suppose I, being a good compositor, a sober man, and not unthriftly, am employed in the office, I must become a member of your society: is that so?—Yes, that was so.

81. That is, I should be reduced to the plane of the unthriftly and improvident?—It was the decided opinion of the majority, at a general meeting held to discuss this subject, that unless the thing were unanimous it would be somewhat of a failure, because the very ones whom it was designed to assist would of themselves withdraw. No complaint was made by those who were in the position you mention. The only complaint that might ever have been heard came from those who were in the position of the unthriftly. All felt that rather than have subscription-lists going round—and they always carried with them a feeling of degradation that men were placed in the position of needing assistance—to avoid that, and place every one on the same footing, the men thought the management should be requested to make it compulsory upon every one coming into the employ to become members of the society.

82. *Hon. Major Steward.*] Your society was available to all the members, notwithstanding their physical disabilities?—That was one of the reasons for starting it. At certain periods in the history of the society there have been a goodly number who could not possibly have passed examination by the doctor.

83. *Mr. Fisher.*] Is this the case: that your society gauges all men by the gauge of the unthriftly and degraded?—No, certainly not.

84. Is this the case: that I, not being unthriftly, and not being degraded, refuse to join this society, I cannot get employment in the office?—That is not so now. Will I state exactly the position of the society at present? Some good few months ago a meeting was held at the request more particularly of one member, who felt he was being imposed upon—or, rather, placed in a false position by the somewhat autocratic attitude of the management in compelling him to become a member when he did not wish to join. This brought up a general discussion, and he was shown that whatever compulsion there was was distinctly at the instigation of the members themselves. A very large majority—in fact, an almost unanimous vote—carried that many years ago, and when it was brought up recently it was decided to keep it as before.

85. *The Chairman.*] With the exception that members of other friendly societies were exempt?—Yes. I may tell you that since that resolution was passed not one member has mentioned that he would like to be relieved of his responsibility of membership.

86. Do you remember a certain strike that took place some years ago?—Yes.

87. Were there any accumulated funds in the hands of the management or committee at that time?—I was a junior apprentice at the time, and do not recollect what the funds were.

88. Whatever the amount was, have you any idea what became of it: was it carried to the new society or were the funds distributed?—It was carried on; the society has never been disbanded.

89. Then, the new hands received the benefit of what the old men had paid in?—A lot of new hands received employment.

90. You have never heard of any surrender value?—I am certain there was no surrender value.

91. Then, the men who went out and withdrew from the society left whatever funds there were in the hands of the management?—Yes.

92. Is that the case now?—Yes. In case of a misunderstanding, I could explain the reason for that. It is the custom with some societies, I believe, to have an arrangement for a surrender value according to some scale; instead of doing that we have no accumulated funds. There is a rule specifying that when the funds reach the sum of £100 the payment of subscriptions shall cease until, by ordinary expenditure, the balance is reduced to the sum of £75.

93. I can well understand that. Was the rule in force at the time we speak of—the strike time?—I am not aware that it was.

94. You were a member of the society?—I was a member at that time, but, being a junior apprentice, I do not remember all the details.