

251. In all probability, Mr. Hebden approached Mr. Reeves at the time, and told him what was going on, and obtained Mr. Reeves's assistance?—Yes; Mr. Reeves gave a very handsome donation to make the thing a success, and from that time it has been a very marked success.

252. Was the society then in its present form with the loan branch?—The loan branch was not a part of it at the very early period. It was probably three or four years afterwards when the loan business started—after they commenced to get a reserve fund.

253. Was that instead of investing the funds—they simply lent the funds amongst members?—We had and have a certain amount of funds invested, but there were surpluses which we put into the Post-Office Savings-Bank. But there were repeated applications from the men for loans, and this idea of lending was conceived.

254. It has been a very successful branch of the business?—Well, I believe it has been a very profitable branch of the business, so far as the society is concerned; but the society scarcely started originally with the idea of making a profit out of it. It was more for the convenience of the men who have managed the society, and who urged it strongly.

255. *Hon. Major Steward.*] Does the society make as much interest out of it as it would by outside investment?—More.

256. And it gives loans when the men could not possibly get them elsewhere?—Not without paying higher interest.

257. I would like to get your opinion upon the question I put to the last witness: whether, if Parliament legislates with regard to these private benefit societies, and a special Act is brought in so framed as to admit of a society like yours being registered, without in any way being crippled in its operations, do you or do you not think it would be an advantage to have legal recognition in that way?—I do not see what advantage there would be in it. The society, as a society, has worked very well; there have been no acrimonious feelings in regard to it so far.

258. *The Chairman.*] Supposing both the trustees were suddenly to die, and the heirs refused to give up the money of the society, what position would the society be in?—I scarcely know the legal position, but I should think there would be no difficulty in getting possession of the funds. I suppose an order from the Court could be obtained to take possession of the money.

259. What Court?—The Supreme Court. I do not know what position the society would be in in the case of the trustees refusing to disgorge the money they held, but it occurs to me there would be a remedy.

260. But the remedy is very expensive. You never heard of any grumbling amongst the men in regard to the society?—I cannot say that I have. There have been differences amongst the men in regard to the internal management, but they have it in their own hands entirely. At the yearly meetings there always is, as in all associations, differences of opinion, but no open bad feeling, or anything approaching it, so far as that goes. I do not know a society anywhere that has worked more amicably than the *Lyttelton Times* society has.

WEDNESDAY, 9TH JUNE, 1897.

WILLIAM WILCOX TANNER was examined on oath.

1. *The Chairman.*] You are a member of the House of Representatives?—Yes; for the electoral district of Avon.

2. You wish to make a statement before the Commission as to Messrs. Frostick and Company?—With regard to the “*Zealandia*” sick benefit society. I may say I was an operative working in the factory in which that organization was started for about a dozen years, during which time the organization was first founded. I was a member of it for some years, and at one time an officer of it—secretary, I believe, if I remember rightly—and I wish to testify to the useful functions that it filled, and also to confirm the statements which I see were made yesterday to the effect that the society was absolutely under the control of the contributors; that no pressure was, to my knowledge, at any time brought to bear on any man to compel him to join; that, so far as my knowledge went, no preference was ever shown to a man who was a member of the society as against one who was not a member; that membership was perfectly optional from the beginning; and that the society was founded—I cannot say who was the first originator of it—most decidedly at the wish of the men themselves, and in the interests of the men, and has been always solely under the management of the men. I have never known any attempt whatever at interference on the part of the proprietors of the factory, though the society always received their cordial support.

3. *Hon. Major Steward.*] Did it receive any financial support from them in your time?—I am half inclined to think that they have given subscriptions. I almost think a subscription was given to assist the men to start the society, but whether that practice was continued I am not aware. I wish also to say that, generally speaking, these small societies in industrial establishments fulfil a very useful function. As far as I know—my knowledge cannot be complete in regard to the whole of them in the colony—they are generally formed at the wish of the employés, and I think the main reason for starting them arises in this way: that amongst working people, as amongst all other classes in the community, there is a percentage of men who are generally improvident, thoughtless, thriftless, and careless. Friendly societies have a tolerably good membership in the colony, and these men are often remonstrated with, when working with those who are members of friendly societies, and urged to join some society. They are usually indifferent, even resentful; but it frequently happens that these men meet with accidents and illnesses, and then some good-natured person, I think with more sympathy than judgment, originates a subscription, and the list is taken round among his fellow-workmen. I may say in the factory I am referring to, some years ago, these lists were so frequent, and they were generally responded to, for no man cared to stand out of them, and if he did his conduct was ascribed to some other motive than the proper one—these lists were so frequent, and subscriptions succeeded one another so rapidly, that I have heard