

159. *Mr. Fisher.*] Does it or does it not appear singular to you that on the withdrawal of the compulsory clauses so large a proportion as 150 out of 450 should withdraw from the society?—There would not be that number at the time, and, of course, apprentices were never in it. I say again it is this matter of carelessness—always intending to do it but never doing it. Of course, they paid up in the other instances because the clause was there, although no force was ever brought to bear.

160. Then the “neglect,” as you call it, is applicable to the old as to the young?—Yes.

161. There must be some capable of exercising individual judgment?—Yes; but it is hardly judgment. For instance, I know of one family who are always in difficulties, and they have more than once during the year been thrown out of employment by sickness, and they do not pay up, and, of course, are unfinancial when sickness comes.

162. One family is a very small proportion of the whole?—Yes; but it is simply one instance. I certainly think in a place where such a vast number is working that it is an advantage to have a society of that description, and that the compulsory clauses are in no way burdensome, but a great advantage to them without doubt.

THURSDAY, 10TH JUNE, 1897.

DAVID HANDSIDES was examined on oath.

1. *The Chairman.*] What is your business?—I am foreman in the car- and wagon-shop of the Government railways.

2. Have you been long in that service?—About nineteen years.

3. Were you in the service before the benefit society started?—No; this society was started nearly twelve months before I entered the service. This is the twentieth year of its existence.

4. Are you an official of the society?—I am secretary, elected in 1889.

5. Have you got a copy of the rules?—Yes [Exhibit 35].

6. Your experience of this society is that it has been of benefit to the men?—It is of very great benefit. I may say in the first place it was started to do away with the subscription-lists that were continually taken round when the men were sick. The lists got to be a regular nuisance.

7. How many employes are there in the workshops altogether?—233.

8. How many of these are of an age that they cannot join the society?—There are about forty who cannot join.

9. Of those who can how many belong to the society?—155.

10. Do the persons who do not join give any reason for not joining?—There are some whose health will not permit them to join.

11. With these exceptions—those whose age and health prevent them from joining—every one in the workshops nearly is a member?—Yes.

12. It is a purely voluntary society?—Yes.

13. There is no interference by the Government in the management?—None at all.

14. *Hon. Major Steward.*] Of those who are not members among the employes, are there any who are in friendly societies?—Yes.

15. Are any of those in the society also members of friendly societies?—Yes; I am an Odd-fellow.

16. *The Chairman.*] What advantage, as a member of a friendly society, do you get besides doctor and medicine?—I get doctor, sick benefit, and funeral benefit.

17. You get sick-pay from your lodge also?—Yes. A society was started in the service nearly twenty years since, which was compulsory, in a manner of speaking. Mr. Conyers, the then Commissioner, was president of the society; he usually presided at the meetings; and, in fact, the men were afraid to say what they would like. But this eventually fell through, as no real interest was taken in it by the men.

18. *Mr. Fisher.*] That was the effect of the compulsory condition?—Yes; the men really would not stand it.

19. *The Chairman.*] Since it has been put on a voluntary footing the men have gone into it?—Yes; before the men did not seem to take any interest in it at all. I wish to point out that the two societies mentioned were distinct and separate societies, the present society being in existence before the other.

20. Have you a balance-sheet?—Yes; these are the two last balance-sheets [Exhibit 36].

21. What do you consider is the cause of that deficiency? Are the rates not enough to meet sick-allowances, or was it an exceptional year?—An exceptional heavy sickness; and at the last yearly meeting they decided to raise the subscription to 2s. 6d. a month—that is, instead of paying 6d. a week we pay 7½d. per week. That does not appear in the rules yet.

22. You found you based your contributions too low?—Yes; as a man gets older he becomes more liable to sickness, and so on.

23. There is a rule here which says that the surplus shall be divided amongst members in proportion to the time they have been in the society: how do you arrange that?—The balance is divided so much per member per month. If a man has been in the society nine months he gets a dividend for nine months. The society winds up at the end of each year, and if a man joins during the year he would not be entitled to the full year's dividend.

24. *Hon. Major Steward.*] Have you thought anything about the desirability or otherwise of legislation taking place so that all these societies could be registered without altering their constitution?—Yes; could you show me any benefits to be gained by having such societies registered?

25. Well, you see, in the event of any defalcation taking place, or anything of that sort, you, being a corporate body at law, could proceed more cheaply than you can now?—We are paid officers, and that makes us liable.