

33. Can you tell us what was the cause of it being started?—In the time of sickness we used to make up a subscription for the person sick, and it used to be 2s. 6d. as a rule. Well, the men found it too much, and the lists used to come round very often, and we thought we could do better by forming a sick club, and paying 6d. a week into it, and making a sick payment of 15s. 6d. per week for six months and half of that amount for three months. So the club was established, and we had these rules printed. We got some rules from the Old Country, and revised them a bit. We waited upon the bosses, and asked them to take charge of the sick club, but they said No. They would have nothing to do with it; and so the society has been worked entirely by the men, and membership is optional. There are many employées who do not belong to it. As a rule, we get a very good dividend every year, just before Christmas.

34. *Hon. Major Steward.*] Of course, these employées who are not members of the club do not participate in the benefits if sick?—No.

35. What do you do if a subscription-list comes round for them?—Well, it all depends. If it is a very deserving case we make a subscription, but we are not supposed, as a rule, to do that.

36. The object is to relieve yourselves from that sort of thing?—Yes; the club was established entirely for that purpose.

37. *The Chairman.*] Have there been any cases of accident in the factory since you have been there?—Yes.

38. If the employé belongs to the society he goes on sick-pay?—Yes.

39. Is there any benefit to the employer in his doing that?—An employé gets nothing whatever from the employer unless he is an apprentice. I believe apprentices get wages, but not workmen.

40. A workman, even if hurt in the employ of the company, would get nothing from the employers in that case?—Not a farthing; he is only paid up to the minute the accident happens.

41. Do you think, then, it is not an advantage to the employer at all that this benefit club was started?—Not a bit; they would not give the men anything.

42. The employers were not the means of getting the society started?—It was entirely with the men.

43. So that the responsibility of the employers to their men in regard to accidents remains the same, both morally and legally?—Just the same.

44. *Hon. Major Steward.*] There has been a suggestion made in various quarters that if any legislation takes place on this matter there should be power given to the majority of the employées to enforce membership of the society upon all: do you or do you not think that the minority who now stand out would regard that as a piece of tyranny?—They would do so; but I think it is beneficial to all of them to belong to the society.

45. You think that occasionally a little wholesome tyranny is not a bad thing?—I do not know. If I could benefit myself or my family by paying a small trifle every week I would do so, but I am not all of them. I also belong to the Foresters, and have done so for some twelve years.

46. I see by the rules you reject those of unsound health?—Yes.

47. But there is no age-limit?—No.

48. You consider generally that the establishment of this society has been of benefit to the men?—I do so.

49. If the society could be registered pretty nearly as it stands now, do you think that would be an advantage?—I do so, most decidedly.

JAMES HUTCHEN was examined on oath.

50. *The Chairman.*] What is your occupation?—I am a timber merchant and ironmonger.

51. You are Stewart and Co.?—That is so.

52. Do you remember the formation of the benefit society?—Yes.

53. It was entirely an idea of the men?—Entirely so.

54. Your company has never subsidised it in any way?—We have never subsidised the society as a society.

55. Do you think the society has been of benefit to the men?—Great benefit, I think.

56. Supposing Parliament could see its way to legalise this society, and make this rule—that if a majority of the men desire it membership should be compulsory on all employées—do you think that would be a good thing?—I believe it would be a good thing. I think this society was established for this reason more than any other. Most of the permanent hands are connected with friendly societies, but many of the casual hands, who are sometimes employed for a long time, are not connected with any society, and the employées thought it would be a good thing to institute a society of this kind in case of sickness amongst these casual men.

57. What I mean is this: In a certain society down south it was found that the younger members, at all events, were not anxious to join unless they were compelled, and in other societies we found that all employées were compelled to join, and that it worked exceedingly well. In your case about two-thirds of them have joined because membership is purely voluntary, but subscription-lists continue to go round for the other third?—I believe it would be a good thing to make membership compulsory.

58. If a man leaves the employ of the firm, but keeps in the society, does he get his sick benefit if ill, as well as his share of the dividend at the end of the year?—Yes; he is a full benefit member, and if he is sick and is unable to keep up his subscription it is kept up for him.

59. You think societies such as these are good things for working-men?—Yes.

60. *Hon. Major Steward.*] I suppose accidents are treated the same as sickness?—It may be; but, of course, we insure them against accidents in the firm.

61. You do not take advantage of the existence of this society to evade your responsibility as employers?—No.