

WILLIAM HUTCHISON was examined on oath.

93. *The Chairman.*] What is your occupation?—I am a boot-finisher at Messrs. Hannah and Co.'s.

94. How long have you been in that service?—About nine years.

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

96. It was a society formed entirely by the men on their own motion?—Yes; it was formed on the same lines as the society in vogue at Skelton and Frostick's, at Christchurch. We adopted their rules.

97. Are you a member of a friendly society?—No; I was, but I ran out.

98. You did not allow your membership of the friendly society to lapse on account of joining this society?—Well, I was in this first, before I joined the friendly society; but I thought one would be sufficient.

99. And this offered the most distinct advantages to you?—I think so.

100. Do you consider this society of value to the men?—I consider it one of the best societies that men possibly could have in any factory.

101. It has proved to be of practical benefit?—Yes.

102. There is no interference on the part of the employer?—Not a semblance of interference.

103. Can you suggest any improvement?—I cannot; it works so well.

104. *Hon. Major Steward.*] You do not think it would be an advantage to give power to a majority of the men in the employ to compel the minority to join?—No; I cannot see any advantage.

105. It would be resented by the others?—Yes.

106. *The Chairman.*] The Friendly Societies Act provides machinery by which in case of defalcations or anything of that sort a remedy can easily be provided by law; now, do you think if this society could be legalised in the same way, pretty nearly with the rules as they are at present, that would be an advantage?—Well, I suppose it would be an advantage. I do not think there is any need for it; I think we can trust one another sufficiently.

107. In the case of your society where you divide the surplus every year there is no accumulation of funds?—No; only £20 is carried forward. There is very little surplus at any time.

108. Have you had any calls on your burial fund?—Only one.

109. So the fund has always been sufficient to meet all demands?—Yes. I might say that Mr. Hannah has given two donations to the burial fund, making £10 altogether.

110. Have you a balance-sheet?—Yes. [Exhibit 44.]

111. The most an adult member can hold is four shares?—Yes.

WEDNESDAY, 16TH JUNE, 1897.

*The Chairman:* Before proceeding to ordinary business I wish to refer to a matter in connection with the Lyttelton Lumpers' and Wharf-labourers' Association. A statement was made by one witness, J. G. T. Wood, that, on a motion being made to register the association under the Conciliation and Arbitration Act, a meeting of the men was held, at which a majority voted for registration under the Act. Wood gave the figures as sixty-one for the motion and fifty-nine against. On being recalled, and cautioned to be careful of what he said on oath, he repeated this statement, and added that the minute-book would confirm his evidence. After the Commission rose I desired the secretary to procure the minute-book of the association, and I found Mr. Wood's evidence was entirely false, as the vote of the men had been given against registration, the figures being fifty-eight for and sixty-three against. This was an important point, because it had been represented that the preponderance of the employers on the association's committee had enabled them to force the association to remain unregistered.

WILLIAM JONES was examined on oath.

1. *The Chairman.*] You are secretary of the Wellington Branch of the Federated Seamen's Union?—Yes.

2. Have you seen the published evidence in regard to the Union Steamship Company Mutual Benefit Society?—I have seen it through the medium of the *Otago Daily Times*.

3. Have you anything to add to that evidence, or is there anything in it which you wish to refute?—I would like to have gone through the evidence carefully, but I have been too busy to make notes. There are one or two paragraphs I would like to have refuted, because from what I can see the information that has been elicited from the members of the society does not, in my opinion, show the matter in the proper light, inasmuch as I think some of them have not said all they know. They might have gone a little further, but possibly they were not in the same position as these men up here in Wellington, who are entirely different, I think myself, having sailed out of Wellington for a few years, and never having been in Dunedin. I think the men here are more open, and not so frightened of the head office of the Union Company. A good many of the men who appeared before the Commission in Dunedin, if they had come here, would have given entirely different evidence, as they have been repeatedly asked, time after time, to join the society. I have known men belonging to friendly societies—one in the "Mawhera," who was an Oddfellow of some eighteen years' standing, who had to leave the Oddfellows in order to join the Union Company's society to get employment. That man is not available now, because he is in a collier, and she does not often come to Wellington; the only way would be for his evidence to be taken at the West Coast. There are other instances like that. In 1891 or 1892 this matter was pretty warm, because the company were then forcing men to join the society. I myself was a member of Court Sir George Bowen Foresters, and I was told on more than one occasion that I would have to join the mutual benefit society.