

205. Can you tell the Committee what was your output of coal last year?—In 1898 it was 53,000 tons. For the first half of the current year it has been 29,000 tons.

206. What is the proportion of what you call face coal and household coal?—I am not quite prepared to say, but I should say 15,000 tons. This year it will be rather more. Last year we had 12,000 tons.

207. Can you give us the price in Wellington and the different centres?—The only two places where we deal directly with the public are at Christchurch and Wellington. In Wellington the actual cost of the face coal is about £1 4s. 10d. a ton; and we distribute it at £1 6s. to £1 8s.—that is in ton lots—half-tons at £1 7s., and quarter-ton lots at £1 8s. For the household screened coal the actual cost is £1 8s. 10d., and we sell at £1 9s., £1 11s., and £1 12s.

208. Is that delivered?—Yes; that is according to the quantity. These are the only places where we deal direct with the consumer—Christchurch and Wellington. In Christchurch we have adopted the plan of using our own carters. We distribute in any quantities the people may require at the same rate.

209. Have you ever adopted the expedient of mixing your coal with other coal?—No.

210. Does the Union Company do all your carrying?—No; we run steamers for ourselves.

211. Are your own steamers sufficient for your trade?—At present the Union Company do any extra work we may require; but the two steamers have been enough for our own purposes, but it is probable we shall have to provide another next year.

212. By what system do you dispose of your coal in other places?—We take orders, and sell there. At Napier, New Plymouth, Timaru, Oamaru, and Bluff we have contracts with the railway, and we simply send as ordered. We also sell to Timaru, Oamaru, the Bluff, and Port Chalmers, and deliver from ship's side.

213. Do you ship to Wanganui?—No; our steamers are too large, and it would not pay to give small steamers the present rate of freight to that place. The coal companies in existence before us had a prior claim on the small steamers, and they get the carrying by those boats.

214. Is your coal soft, and easily damaged in transit?—It is much the same class of coal as Westport coal, but, on the whole, it is somewhat harder. We do not make quite so much small coal.

215. May it not be accounted for by the fact that you load by cranes and have no staiths?—No, not altogether; it is the character of the coal itself. It is not so friable as the Coalbrookdale or the Westport-Cardiff.

216. I want the Committee to understand that at Greymouth they load entirely by the crane method. Do you not think, Mr. Turner, that the screening at Greymouth is a mistake? Do you not think it would be better to leave it till the coal gets to its destination?—The cost of screening is very much less there. It is screened into the trucks from the bins. There would be a difference between 6s. a ton, f.o.b. Greymouth, for the small coal, and 10s. a ton if we had to bring it round, for we would have to pay full charges on it, freight, wharfage, and railage, also all the incidental expenses would have to be added on to it.

217. It would all add to the cost?—Yes.

218. What is the difference in the price of your coal and the Westport Company's coal in Christchurch?—From 4s. to 7s. a ton.

219. I am speaking now of screened coal?—There is about the same difference charged by the retailers. Our coal is not largely sold by the dealers, as they do not make much profit out of it, and therefore they do not encourage it. Although we charge £1 9s. in Wellington the minimum charge per ton for Westport is £1 14s., in Wellington—a minimum difference of 5s., and on the smaller quantities it spreads it to a difference of 6s. a ton. The same rule applies at Christchurch, though not to the same extent in Otago. They have there the local competition, and consequently make very little profit.

220. *Mr. Tanner.* You spoke of supplying the public of Christchurch and Wellington. Do you supply the public of Lyttelton?—Yes.

221. You have not given us the particulars of the way in which the public at Lyttelton are supplied?—We have supplied there only in truck-loads at the ship's side at from £1 3s. to £1 6s. per ton.

222. You speak of the sea-carriage costing 6s. 3d. a ton?—My figures are based on the Union Company's rates. To Wellington it is 5s. 3d., and to Lyttelton 6s. 3d. a ton.

223. I understand your own boats carry your coal?—I say my quotations of cost are based on the cost of carriage by the Union Company.

224. Is the 6s. 3d. rate fixed to cover the cost and leave the Union Steam Ship Company a margin of profit?—It is the contract rate they have with the Westport Coal Company and Brunner Company.

225. And which has also been agreed upon between you and the Union Company?—Yes.

226. If they carry some of your coal?—Yes. I then have to pay 5s. 3d. and 6s. 3d.; and if we can carry for them we charge 5s. 3d. and 6s. 3d.

227. You carry for each other at the same rate?—Yes.

228. That rate is the Union Company's rate?—Yes.

229. May I ask if you have made any separate estimate of the cost of sea-carriage as shown by your vessels, irrespective of the Union Company?—For our own purpose we simply pool everything. We take the working-expenses of the boats for the whole year and fix our prices accordingly, but 6s. 3d. is the minimum rate to Lyttelton charged under Union Company's tariff. It was a much higher rate till about a year ago.

230. Have you the rate for ten years ago, and are you acquainted with it?—I would not like to commit myself to figures for that period.

231. Am I not right in assuming that the rate has been a steady downward one for the last ten years?—Yes; it reached its lowest point about eighteen months ago, when it was made 6s. 3d.

232. What was the price immediately preceding the reduction?—6s. 6d. to Wellington and 7s. 6d. to Lyttelton.