

233. *Mr. Hogg.*] I think you told the Committee that the cost to the consumer in Christchurch for Blackball coal is £1 10s. a ton, and similar coal is sold for the same price in Wellington?—From £1 9s. to £1 11s. in Wellington.

234. Practically the same price?—About the same price.

235. Can you account for that, seeing that in Christchurch you have to pay 3s. 6d. a ton railage from Lyttelton, also wharfrage there and 1s. extra freight? Can you explain why, under these circumstances, the coal is actually dearer in Wellington than in Christchurch?—It is not so if you really look into it. In Wellington you have to pay 1s. a ton wharfrage. You then have to cart it to a yard, and this, with the weighing, comes to about 1s. 2d. You have then to pay an increased delivery rate of from 1s. to 1s. 6d. a ton to the consumer. You will find that there is not such a large discrepancy as you may think.

236. You have to pay for cartage to the yards in Christchurch?—No; we have a railway siding. 6d. for labour puts it into the yard.

237. And you have the 1s. 2d.?—Yes, in Wellington.

238. And you have to pay for delivery?—I pay 2s. 6d. in Christchurch as against 3s. 6d. and 4s. here. You cannot cart so easily up the hills as you can on the plains.

239. And that is how you cannot reduce the price?—Yes.

240. There is 1s. difference in the freight?—I am allowing that.

241. You said the Wellington consumer gets no advantage from that?—In Lyttelton the wharfrage is only 6d., and it was 4d., 8d. difference. There is 1s. 2d. charges—viz., 2d. weighing and 1s. carting from the ship's side to the siding; and from 1s. to 1s. 6d. a ton increased delivery to the consumer.

242. Does it not strike you as an anomaly that, with a splendid harbour, and at a less distance from the West Coast, coal is dearer here than in Christchurch, considering the latter is an inland town?—We sell practically from the ship's side at 1s. a ton less in Wellington than we do in Lyttelton.

243. Are the wharfrage rates dearer here?—Yes; 1s. per ton, Wellington; 6d. per ton, Lyttelton. I may say that when we opened the yard here we reduced the selling price to the consumer from 4s. to 5s. a ton on the then existing rates. Our rates are based on fighting the Newcastle. We would like to deliver at the Newcastle rates, if possible.

244. *Mr. Morrison.*] You are a merchant and commission agent in Christchurch?—Yes.

245. I suppose your agency for the Blackball Company is only one agency among others?—I am open to any other business.

246. Your business does not lie entirely in the Blackball Company's agencies?—No; but nearly all my time is given to the Blackball Company's work. I work their steamers and sell and distribute the coal throughout the colony.

247. How long has the company been in existence, and what is the amount of nominal capital and capital called up?—The Blackball Company was called originally the Blackball Creek Company. That was the first company. It was reformed in 1892 with a capital of £60,000 in 6,000 shares, and increased to £80,000 in 8,000 shares, of which £44,900 was subscribed, and also debentures to the amount of £10,250. The company went into liquidation in 1897, and was reconstructed in 1898 under the present style of the Blackball Company, with a nominal capital of £35,000 in £1 shares, of which £24,516 is subscribed, and debentures amounting to £31,000.

248. How much of the £35,000 was subscribed?—£24,516.

249. And the debentures that were issued?—£31,000.

250. The capital, then, of the present company is about £54,516?—Yes.

251. Have you declared a dividend on that—that is, the new company?—No; there has been no dividend declared. In the first year £372 was written off for depreciation on £18,050, but since then we have had no opportunity of earning enough to make a dividend.

252. Speaking of your knowledge of the company, it is not making enough to pay a dividend?—No; the overhead charges are the same on the present quantity we are turning out as they would be on a much greater quantity.

253. I thought you said the output of the company was 53,000 tons?—Yes; 53,000 in 1898 for the whole of the year, and 29,000 for the half-year ending June, 1899.

254. Have you any knowledge of the wages that are paid, the position in which the Blackball Company hold their leases from the Crown, and what they pay for royalties?—The cost of hewing coal at the mine and expenses come to 4s. 7½d. per ton, of which 2s. 3d. was paid to the hewers, against 2s. 1d. which Mr. Broome has said was paid at the Westport-Cardiff mine. The expenses of the aerial tramway from Blackball come to 4½d. per ton. The railage to the shipping-point, Greymouth, is 2s. 6d. per ton. The royalty on the lease is 6d. per ton. The overhead charges of all kinds come to 1s. 8d. per ton. The overhead charges are the expenses of controlling the company in London (the company being an English one), including the interest on debentures, and the expenses of controlling it in New Zealand. I say "overhead," because I am putting it at per ton.

255. *Mr. Tanner.*] What interest do you pay?—I think it is 5 per cent. We pay ½d. to the Accident Fund under the Coal-miners Act of 1891, and insurance and incidental expenses amount to 1½d., which brings it to 9s. 10d. as the rate per ton, f.o.b. Greymouth, for face-coal.

256. *Mr. Morrison.*] What is the area your company holds in leases?—I could not say. It is a considerable area. They estimate they have enough coal for a good many years.

257. Can you give us any idea of the number of men you employ—that is, coal-hewers alone?—There are forty-four coal-hewers.

258. And their average earnings?—The forty-four men earned £348 in a fortnight, or something like £3 17s. to £3 18s. per man per week, according to the last pay-sheet.

259. *The Chairman.*] Is that working full time?—They made overtime in some cases. They were paid at the rate of 2s. 3d. per ton.

260. *Mr. Morrison.*] How many shifts were there in that fortnight?—I could hardly tell you. This is simply a summary.