

5. Suppose a coal-mine is not being worked on the most economical principles, is there any thing in the Coal-mines Act to empower the Inspector to compel the mine being worked in the most advantageous way?—Yes. And I had a letter from Mr. Tennant in reply to my communication, saying that he had inspected the mine, and saying that, in the face of what we had taken out, we had done the best we could do, both in the interests of ourselves and the State.

6. And what are the relations existing between the company and the miners: is it amicable?—Yes; so far as I am aware.

7. The quality of the coal is friable, and is easily broken?—Yes.

8. More than usually so?—Yes; it is very friable.

9. As a practical man, would you consider that a more advantageous method could be adopted to remove the coal—that is, in the method of shipping it—at Westport?—Yes. We have it loaded by “tipplers,” which, instead of dashing the coal over, turn the tubs over and pour it easily out. It is a slower process than the old methods, but, of course, does not knock the coal about so much. It then goes over screened bars, and that takes a large portion of the slack out. What is not taken out is then taken over a jiggling screen, and that takes all the remainder of the slack out. From there it goes on to an iron belt, and we have a lot of boys picking out any dirt, &c. That is on a grade which lands it just on top of the railway-wagons, so it drops in very gently. It goes to Westport, and there gets a drop right into the ship’s hold. It is distressing to watch it going into such ships as the “Pukaki.”

10. A drop of about 40 ft.?—It must be.

11. Does it depreciate the value of the coal?—Whatever the cost of rescreening is, to load by crane would do away with it, in my opinion.

12. As to the quality of the coal, in your opinion, is the best Coalbrookdale equal to the best Newcastle?—I have not the analysis, but I do not think there is any comparison between New South Wales and Westport.

13. How many screenings has it to go through before it reaches the consumer?—It is screened at the mine, and then screened at its destination.

14. Do you not think it would be better if the coal was not screened until it reached the point of delivery?—I do not think you could deal with it; you see, there is such a large proportion of slack. To send a cargo of unscreened coal to Wellington and screen it there, I suppose you would get 40 per cent. of slack out of it. And the market is not there for it. If you screen it at the mine you can send the slack where you like.

15. So you do not think it is practicable to reduce the proportion of slack?—Only in a small way. They are trying it at Lyttelton, but it has only been in operation a few months.

16. Do you think any more economical way could be adopted in taking the coal from the mine to the ship’s side: is there any means by which you could suggest an improvement?—The abolition of the staith system for screened coal is, in my opinion, the chief thing.

17. There is another point I want your opinion on. There is no doubt that loading by the staiths depreciates the value of coal for household purposes?—No doubt about it.

18. Does it also depreciate its value for steaming purposes?—I do not think it would so much.

19. It would to an extent?—Yes, to some extent. There is not much screened coal sold for steaming purposes.

20. There is one advantage in the staiths that might compensate for any damage: the coal is loaded with greater rapidity?—For unscreened or small coal I would not like to see the staiths done away with.

21. It enables vessels to load with greater expedition?—Yes.

22. For household purposes the staith system should be superseded by the crane system?—No doubt about it.

23. I have here an extract from the *Christchurch Press* of the 4th September. It is a letter by Mr. Bickerton Fisher, complaining of excessive royalty, railage- and haulage-rates, also of the wages of the miners, and implying that all this adds unduly to the cost of the coal. He also complains of the plant being subject to very high duties. Do you agree with that about the wages of the miners? Do you not think it would be unsatisfactory to reduce the wages of the miners?—Well, all I will say is that I like to see miners get fair wages.

24. In regard to the railage charge, of course there would be a sensible reduction in the price of coal if the haulage-rates were reduced?—I suppose there would be, but I am not acquainted with the commercial aspect of coal-mining.

25. You say there are many points in which saving could be effected?—Principally by shipping by the staiths.

26. *Mr. Morrison.*] Are you the underground manager or general manager?—I am mining manager of the Westport Coal Company at Denniston. We have two sections there—the Iron Bridge and Coalbrookdale Collieries. For each of these sections I have a mine-manager that looks after the safety of the miners and the safety of the mine.

27. Can you give us any idea of the area you hold at the Iron Bridge and the Coalbrookdale sections?—Roughly speaking, the Iron Bridge is 1,500 acres and the Coalbrookdale 1,000 acres—2,500 acres altogether.

28. You hold that from the Crown?—Yes.

29. Is the royalty you pay on the net output?—No; on the sales.

30. Is not the Crown rent fixed at a certain rate, and on this 2,500 acres you would pay a minimum rent?—The minimum is merged in the royalty after you get over a certain amount.

31. The royalty you pay is more than the minimum rent?—Considerably more. In addition to that is $\frac{1}{2}$ d. a ton for the accident fund.

32. How do you pay your men, by day or by ton?—We pay by tonnage-rates as a rule, and we have day-work and contract-work.