

33. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] To what do you attribute that—an advance in the price of textiles, and an increase in the cost of labour?—I should think an increase in the cost of labour, but really I would not like to say.

34. *The Chairman.*] We have had evidence that a great deal of the increased cost of living is owing to a more extravagant style of living: is that your impression also?—Yes, it is. I think that people could help themselves a great deal more than they do: In nine out of ten houses you go to there are no gardens, although in most cases there is enough land to grow some vegetables, and I think that if vegetables were grown the people could help themselves in that way. As to house-rent, I think that is dreadfully dear now. I know of little cottages of three and four rooms which were formerly rented at 6s. 6d. a week, and now the rent is 7s. and 8s. a week. Of course, they do not improve with age. I think it is simply disgraceful the way in which some of these small houses are crowded—sometimes with families of nine or ten children. These poor people have to take such small houses because they cannot afford to pay a higher rent. If you tell the Inspector he goes to them and tells them that they must move; but how can they move when they have not got the money and cannot afford higher rent?

35. It has been alleged by some people that they can hardly make money go so far now on account of the increased cost of living. Does that fit in with the theory that people are more extravagant, and are spending more money in sports, pictures, &c.? Is it that the money which they might spend on necessities of life is being spent on luxuries?—I think so, to a certain extent. Of course, in connection with the Coal and Blanket Fund, we have reports to make, and forms to fill in, and last year I had to report on a number of cases of distress. In nine cases out of ten they tell you that their position is owing to the high cost of living. In some cases drunkenness has got something to do with it, but you do not always want to have money to get drunk with.

36. *Mr. Veitch.*] You say that there are more applicants for relief now than there were some time ago?—Yes.

37. Do you think there are more in proportion to the population of the city?—Yes, I do.

38. Do you think there is more poverty now?—Yes, there is a lot of poverty, but I think it is a shocking thing the number of young people applying for help—people not thirty years of age. You go into their homes, and there is not a blanket in the place, scarcely. I think the system of allowing them to get furniture on time-payments is almost a curse.

39. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] I suppose the inference is that they get furniture on the time-payment system, and after a year or two it is taken from them?—Yes, and then they go in for high-priced furniture.

40. *The Chairman.*] Manufacturers and farmers complain of the scarcity of labour: would you attribute that to the disinclination of the men to go into the country, and to the disinclination of women to go into factories?—As to men who go into the country, of course they have often two homes to keep up. I think sometimes that in the case of girls it is often a matter of necessity their having to get married; but at the same time I think it would be better for them to live it down than to get married under the circumstances in which they are placed, and the wretched life to which it sometimes leads. I think also that in the case of girls who go into factories, and then subsequently get married, it often means that they are dreadful managers of a household. Of course, that is a great misfortune.

41. *Mr. Fairbairn.*] Do you find that there is a tendency to live on artificially prepared foods—tinned fruits, &c., instead of cooking natural meals?—Yes; very often when I visit a house and get no answer at the front door I go to the back of the house, and from the number of empty tins which I see there I know that they must live largely on tinned food.

42. You really think that there is more distress amongst the people now than there was five or six years ago?—I do.

43. *Dr. Hight.*] May not the increase in the number of persons seeking relief be due to some extent to the greater publicity which has been given to your Fund of late?—We try to keep it as quiet as we can, but when we want funds we really must mention it in the newspapers.

44. Is not the knowledge of the existence of the Fund much more widely spread than it was a few years ago?—I do not think so. We have always called for tenders in the newspapers. At one time they used to announce in the newspapers that the Fund was going to start, but now we never do that.

45. The prices which you quoted to us as to potatoes, &c., are average prices paid?—Yes.

46. Have you anything else you can tell us as to the cause of the increased cost of living?—No. I have not had much time to prepare a full statement.

Mrs. AUGUSTA ELISE WILSON examined on oath. (No. 41.)

1. *The Chairman.*] You have lived in this district for some years?—Yes, for a great number of years—over thirty years.

2. Our inquiry only reaches back for twenty years. Will you kindly confine your statement to the last twenty years? We are a Commission to inquire into the rise in the cost of living. In your opinion, has there been a rise in the cost of living, say, within the last ten years?—I have found it so in my household accounts.

3. Could you give us the figures for the last ten years?—I cannot give you the figures of my own accounts, but I can give you the figures prepared from the accounts of a number of other householders.

4. Can you give us the results of other people's experience, say, for the last five years?—These accounts which I have here have been collected within the last five years. This table has not