

REPORT.

To His Excellency the Right Honourable Arthur William de Brito Savile, Earl of Liverpool, Knight Grand Cross of the Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George, Member of the Royal Victorian Order, Governor and Commander-in-Chief in and over His Majesty's Dominion of New Zealand and its dependencies.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY,—

The Commission, dated the 28th day of September, 1914, entrusted to us by Your Excellency, was received on the 30th idem, upon which date the Commission assembled at Huntly.

On the following day the inquiry was formally opened at the Courthouse, Huntly, but was adjourned after a short sitting to enable the Commissioners to visit the mine and make an inspection of the scene of the accident.

The taking of evidence at Huntly was commenced on the 2nd and continued until the 9th October, when the Commission adjourned to Wellington, where further evidence was taken on the 23rd October.

During the course of its investigations the Commission examined twenty-three witnesses.

The proceedings were open to the public, and full reports were published in the newspapers.

The parties represented by counsel were,—

- (1.) The Mines Department and Inspector Bennie (represented by Mr. P. S. K. Macassey, Assistant Crown Law Officer, Wellington).
- (2.) The Taupiri Coal-mines (Limited), (represented by Mr. C. J. Tunks, barrister, of Auckland).
- (3.) The trustees of Ralph's Estate, the owners of the freehold of the mine (represented by Mr. W. J. Napier, barrister, of Auckland).
- (4.) The Executive of the Taupiri Coal-miners' Union (represented by Mr. G. M. Newton, barrister, of Auckland).
- (5.) The widows of certain miners killed by the explosion (represented by Mr. A. M. Gould, solicitor, of Auckland).
- (6.) The widows of certain other miners killed by the explosion (represented by Mr. T. M. Wilford, barrister, of Wellington).
- (7.) The coal-miners of the Dominion affiliated with the United Federation of Labour (represented by Mr. T. M. Wilford, barrister, of Wellington).

With the consent of all parties, it was arranged that Mr. Wilford should call the witnesses and conduct the examination in chief, and that each counsel for the other parties represented should cross-examine in the order arranged among themselves.

The Taupiri Company's mine, in which the accident the subject of this Commission's inquiry occurred, is situated in the Township of Huntly, near the Waikato River, and extends under that river in a southerly direction to a considerable distance beyond. The company is the lessee from the owners of two coal-mines, known respectively as Ralph's and the Taupiri Extended Mines. These mines are contiguous but are worked independently, and a barrier of coal 2 chains in width separates the working of one from the other. There is a duly certificated manager in charge of each mine, but Mr. James Fletcher, the manager of Ralph's Mine, exercises a general supervision over both. The operations in these mines are extensive, covering an area of 840 acres, and a large number of men are employed in each colliery. The coal obtained is a lignite of superior quality. Ralph's Mine, the scene of the accident, has three shafts, by any one of which access to or egress from any part of the mine may be obtained. The principal shaft is situated close to the railway-line in the Huntly Township. It descends vertically to a depth of 166 ft., and from the bottom of this shaft the main travelling-way dips uniformly to the end, a distance of 60 chains, in a southerly direction.