

948. You have no reason, but you have formed the opinion without any reason that the truth is doubtful?—The truth is doubtful; I have my reasons for believing so.

949. You have doubts, but you have got no reasons that you can assign for those doubts?—I have no actual evidence.

950. Have you any information?—From information received, I have.

951. There is no reason why I should not have got that at first. You could have supplied a reason for believing that it is not true. You have told me that the letter was not worthy of credence. Do you realize what you have said?—I did not use the word "credence".

952. That is a pure quibble; you said the letter was not true?—In my opinion, it is not true.

953. The letter of the mine-manager is not true?—I doubt its truth.

954. As far as it goes, or whether it is the whole truth?—I doubt if it is the whole truth, from information I have received.

955. What is the true information?—That there were burnings that were not put down in Mr. Fletcher's letter.

956. Since two years before the 14th January, 1914: were you told of these burnings during the two years previous to that?—They were of comparatively recent date.

957. And you were told it by a man who had got into a place where he had no business to be. Did it ever occur to you that Mr. Fletcher had not heard of that case?—I do not know whether Mr. Fletcher knew or did not know, but that was only one of several cases.

958. When did you find out about the inaccuracy of Mr. Fletcher's statement?—I have formed my opinion, and I am going to stick to it.

959. I want to know if you are going to stick to the opinion that Mr. Fletcher did not in his official letter state the whole truth?—Yes; he did not report everything that occurred in the way of burnings.

960. That is your opinion, and it is based upon the fact that some one whom you, quite rightly, do not name told you of a case—one case?—One case specially, but he referred to other cases.

961. If Mr. Fletcher were to state on his oath that he knew nothing at all about such a case, would you then withdraw what you said as to the inaccuracy of his letter?—I think Mr. Fletcher is a truthful man, and if he swore on oath that there were no other cases to his knowledge I would believe he was speaking the truth; but that would not clear my mind that men had not been burned.

962. That is an entirely different matter. You are prepared to accept Mr. Fletcher's statement that he knew nothing about such a case?—If he swears that he knew of no other cases but those, I am prepared to believe him.

963. And you want Mr. Fletcher's oath before you accept his official letter to the Inspector—do you want his oath before you accept his letter?—Not unless he desires to give it.

964. Will you accept his letter?—I will if he now endorses it.

965. Then all you stated about your doubts may be crossed out now?—If he now says it is true.

966. Do you think Mr. Fletcher requires to be put under such a serious condition before he states the truth?—I would like him to say that.

967. Why do you suggest that he should be asked to say that it is true now?—Because we are now under totally different conditions. That letter was written before the great explosion occurred, and I would like him to say now whether it is absolutely true.

968. Do you suggest that Mr. Fletcher has two methods of writing letters—one when he is serious and one when he is not serious?—I do not suggest anything.

969. Do you still say, in spite of my examination, that you doubt the accuracy of that letter?—Until Mr. Fletcher has absolutely stated that it is true, I still doubt it.

970. Does that apply to every letter and every report to the Inspector?—No, they are written under different conditions altogether. This letter admits concealment of burnings of men. The other letters from him are ordinary business letters.

971. Giving up a concealment? Do you think he was under any impression or concealment?—Mr. Bennie did not show me his letter before he wrote it. I asked him to put "without prejudice."

972. Is there anything anywhere that leads you to suppose that Mr. Fletcher ever thought he was suspected of concealing anything?—I do not know what was in his mind.

973. If Mr. Fletcher had wanted to conceal this, would he have included it—these matters of Conn and Willcox—in the letter that he wrote to Mr. Bennie in 1912?—I do not know what the letter he wrote in 1912 contained. This is the first I have heard of a letter in 1912.

974. You realize now that you have Mr. Bennie's letter and Mr. Fletcher's reply, that Mr. Bennie did not have to resort to "without prejudice" to get the information?—Unless he said it verbally.

975. Have you not heard of this letter of the 29th March, 1912, from Mr. Fletcher to Mr. Bennie? He says, "I enclose a list of workmen who have received accidents"?—I never heard of it.

976. It includes quite a number of various kinds of accidents, amongst the number is one of burns: "16th February, David Conn—burns to face and hands." It does not say by gas. It also refers to William Willcox. You admit that Mr. Fletcher reported the fact that Conn and Willcox had been burned on the 29th March, 1912?—Yes, but the report did not mention "burns by gas"; they might have been burns received at boilers or in the smithy.

977. Now, may I have those vouchers of the payment to these men from the Coal-miners' Relief Fund, which you referred to a little while ago? "David Conn: Arms, neck, and face burnt." This, at any rate, reached the Under-Secretary, Mr. Reed, and also the Minister?—Yes.

978. It contains the same information—the doctor's certificate that the burn was due to mining?—Yes, but it is for the Coal-miners' Relief Fund, and includes blacksmiths and enginemmen.

979. Now we come to Willcox; here we have a pink form and a green form—the pink is declaring on and the green form declaring off. The doctor's certificate says, "This is to certify that Mr.