

51. I want to put on record particularly what you said on the 15th August about the Taupiri Coal-mines (Limited): "Firedamp prevalent, several miners burnt by ignitions of gas. (Disastrous explosion possible.)—F.R."?—That is so.

52. And you recommended alterations in the Act?—I recommended those nearly three years ago. I was asked a question as to whether the new Bill would rectify the defects in the old Act, and that is part of my answer.

53. The suggested remedy is provided in clause 7 (h) (iii)—that no lamp other than a locked safety-lamp shall be allowed or used in any place in a mine in which there is likely to be any quantity of inflammable gas as to render the use of naked lights dangerous?—Yes, that is in the clause in the Bill.

54. You directed the Under-Secretary's attention to it to show where the remedy was provided?—Yes, at his request.

55. On the 15th August you said in regard to these mines: "Disastrous explosion possible"?—I did.

56. What was your next communication?—I was still very nervous, and so I got some electric safety-lamps and brought them up to Mr. Bennie at the Thames eight days before the explosion, so that I could demonstrate the use of them to him, and show that they gave a good light for the roof. I went to the Waitangi Mine and experimented with them, showing Mr. Bennie what these lamps could do. Mr. Bennie was rather doubtful that safety-lamps would give enough light for examining the roof, and that is the only point upon which we differed. I took these electric lamps up to him to show that they gave an excellent light, and subsequently asked him to take them to Mr. Fletcher and try and induce him to use similar lamps at Ralph's Colliery.

57. Did you make a special trip to the Thames for this purpose—to take those lamps?—No, I went up to have a conference with Mr. Burgess and the Inspectors. We went down the deep-level mine there, which is dangerous. Mr. Bennie and I were discussing the dangers of the Thames Mine, and I said, "It is dangerous, but not nearly so dangerous as Ralph's Mine at Huntly, by a very great deal." This was on the Saturday evening before the disaster. I went to Greymouth after that, arriving there on Thursday, the 10th. I went to the Port Elizabeth State Colliery, of which I am the Consulting Engineer, and in conversation there with the manager, Mr. I. A. James, I told him of the conditions existing at Ralph's Mine, and that I feared a disaster.

58. How many days was that before the explosion?—One day before—on Friday. The next day I was in his office drafting letters with Mr. James when his clerk came in and said that Ralph's Colliery had exploded and many men were entombed. I was not surprised, and Mr. James said, "Mr. Reed, you told me yesterday it was likely to happen."

59. Then there is on this file another minute dated the day of the accident (12/9/14). It is from Mr. Blow to the Minister of Mines, and was apparently written by the Under-Secretary on receipt of advice concerning the disaster. The minute says, "This shows that the fears of the Inspecting Engineer were well grounded, and points to the urgent necessity for proceeding with the Coal-mines Amendment Bill"?—Yes.

60. Then we have it, Mr. Reed, that on six or seven occasions this year you warned the Mines Department of what might happen?—Yes. Might I also say that I have never made such a prediction or such statements about any other collieries. This is the first occasion on which I have predicted a disaster in this country; I have never been in the country when one happened.

61. Were you very uneasy about the matter?—I was. I think the letters show that.

62. Now, the chief point you make in your letter of the 13th August, which accompanied that tabulated statement, is in regard to safety-lamps?—Yes.

63. Do you consider, Mr. Reed, that there is any doubt about there being a necessity to use safety-lamps in the Taupiri mines?—It is absolutely necessary.

64. Is it arguable?—Not at all. I may say that I was born and brought up on the Durham Coalfield. I have thoroughly understood the danger of firedamp for thirty years. This is a safety-lamp mine always—after the knowledge of the first ignition.

65. In your opinion, if safety-lamps had been used in this mine would this disaster have occurred and all these lives been sacrificed?—No, this disaster has been proved to have been caused by an ignition of gas by a naked light; the other day I measured at one part of the mine 350,000 cubic feet of explosive mixtures—within the last ten days.

66. I want to ask why, occupying the position you hold, you did not help to see that legislation was placed on the statute-book long before this requiring the use of safety-lamps in such mines as Ralph's?—I was a member of the Royal Commission on Mines in 1911, and that Commission reported strongly in favour of them. It is there in print, and you can see it on pages 12 and 13. I think the Commission has copied the British statute into its recommendation. It gives the Department and the Inspectors a great deal of power as regards the ordering of the use of safety-lamps. Under it the Inspector of Mines would have almost unlimited power. On pages 12 and 13 of the report of the Commission there appear recommendations covering the use of safety-lamps in mines.

67. Are those recommendations almost copied from the English Act?—Yes, and from the report of the Royal Commission in England.

68. The Commission reported that safety-lamps were required, and also that legislation was necessary?—I do not think we said anything about legislation; we recommended that it be placed on the statute-book.

69. This Bill (Coal-mines Amendment Bill, 1912) was introduced in 1912; did it ever see the light of day?—Yes, that is a copy of the Bill introduced by the Minister of Mines during the session following our recommendation—that would be 1912.

70. This Bill contains the recommendations of the Commission?—It contains a good many of them.