

335. Cannot you give us the benefit of your opinion as to what was the attractive cause?—I might explain it in such a way as this: Perhaps the men who did not belong to any society thought that by being members of the company's society their employment would be insured to a certain extent. This is the only reason I can give.

336. That was a very strong and attractive reason?—I do not see that there is anything wrong in saying that, but, so far as pressure is concerned, I am not aware that I have ever had complaints from the men in regard to it.

337. Have you never heard that the single men grumble about having to pay?—No; I have never heard of that. I know that single men get more benefit from the society.

338. *Mr. Fisher.*] You say the men come to you in numbers asking to be allowed to join the society?—I know of cases where they were not allowed to join the society.

339. Well, listen to this: "He was asked by Messrs. Ness and Kirby to join the society. The men were called together in the smoking-room, and the society's rules and regulations were read." Is that correct?—Not so far as I am aware. At the time of the inauguration of the society there was no such thing as calling the men together, so far as I know. No one asked me to join the society. I went to the purser to get a certificate to be examined by the doctor, in the same way, I presume, as the others did.

340. *The Chairman.*] You say there has been no compulsion or pressure?—Not to my knowledge.

341. There is no harm in using the word "compulsion" when your preface says, on page 7, "It shall not, however, be compulsory for them to join the society, though all who join the company's service in future shall be required to do so, and pay an entrance-fee in accordance with the rules, within one month of their joining the company's service." That reads like compulsion, or something like it?—Yes, it reads something like it; but if you read Rule 6 you will see this: "Any employé in the company's service who is in good standing on the books of a registered friendly society shall not be required to join this society."

342. *Mr. Fisher.*] I am seeking for information on this point. For instance, you say there has been no pressure. Then, what is meant by this letter: "To Purser, 'Grafton.'—Please enrol Dunning if not forty years of age, and recommended by Mr. McNicol, and inform Dorling that unless he joins forthwith, paying as from 1st April last, instructions will be issued for his dismissal from the service"? That letter was sent on the 11th May, 1896, which is only a year ago?—I do not think anything of that. I can say that the letter did not have very much effect, because ever since its being written, and even prior to its being written, I have from time to time distinctly remonstrated with the secretary for writing or communicating with the officials of the ships in any shape or form with regard to the members of the society, and so much so that it has brought about the dismissal of that officer for interfering too much with the privileges of the men. I might say, as a working-man, it does not always do to make yourself too forward; but men have trusted me implicitly with this matter, and I have fought it out to the end. This letter was not written by the instructions of the Union Company. I find it has been done on the secretary's own responsibility, because he is the paid official of the society, and I am the man who recommended him. When we balloted for him there were about sixty applicants for the position.

343. Still, you say there is no pressure?—I will show you that the pressure is not to be attributed to the Union Company or the society.

344. This man wrote, you say, as an irresponsible person?—Yes.

345. Now, listen to what the Hon. Mr. McLean says, and he is not an irresponsible person: "It did not concern the Union Company, for the company had come to an agreement with the Seamen's Union by which, after the 30th September, no influence was to be used in any way on either side—it was to be completely voluntary whether men stayed in the society or not; and when that agreement was signed, which would probably be in a day or two, instructions would be given even now to bring its provisions into effect." This is his further statement: "Of course, so far as the Union Company was concerned, the necessity for any inquiry was done away with by the fact that after the 30th September it would be open to the men to do what they liked; and the company was going further than the agreement, for it was going to make membership of the society voluntary after the agreement was signed"?—I cannot say that Mr. McLean, in making that statement here, is making it, as it were, on any authority but his own. We do not look upon Mr. McLean as instructing us in what we shall do; he has absolutely nothing to do with us, or with what the Union Company does with regard to the membership or other arrangement with any other union, whether the seamen's or any other. At the present time the company have interested themselves, and reasonably so, because they contribute largely to the funds of the society; but I question very much if Mr. McLean has made use of a statement that he has made an arrangement with the union, whether that arrangement will affect our members or not. Mr. McLean's arrangements and our members' arrangements are two entirely different things. Mr. McLean cannot say that after the 30th September this society—"We want you to leave it"—he cannot say so because the men have an interest in it.

346. I understand you to say—if you say it—that Mr. McLean speaks erroneously with regard to the agreement, because only a few days ago this statement was promulgated to the public through an influential paper: "The company has intimated its intention of doing at the end of September that which it has all along expressed its intention to do—retire from all participation in the management as soon as the society could go alone, and make it then a purely voluntary association, like any other friendly society." Is that correct?—No. My construction of the matter is this: that where it says the end of September it should be the present time, because that is actually being done to-day. It is being done now. There is no need to wait till after the end of September, because it is optional for men joining the service now to join the society. It is not conditional now.