

they are. There is something about having this actuarial point brought to perfection, and I would prefer to remain till then.

393. *Mr. Fisher.*] Suppose you were to-morrow to send in to the committee of the benefit society written notice of your intention to withdraw from the society, and suppose, also, you were to proceed in that withdrawal, how would that affect, or would it affect, your position in the Union Company's employ?—I do not think it would affect my position; I am certain of it.

394. Then, you think the influence of the Union Company is not exercised in that direction—to affect a man injuriously?—I am certain it is not the Union Company's intention at all, so far as I am concerned.

395. You may be aware that the Union Company, in certain cases, does exercise pressure?—I am not aware of anything of the kind.

THURSDAY, 20TH MAY, 1897.

CHARLES GRATER was examined on oath.

1. *The Chairman.*] Are you an employé of the Union Company?—No; I am an employé of the benefit society—the secretary. I have no connection whatever with the Union Company. I am carrying on business as an accountant in addition to the secretaryship of the society.

2. *Mr. Fisher.*] How long have you occupied this office of secretary?—Since October, 1892—close on five years now.

3. Needless to ask, you are still, and have been from 1892, the secretary?—Yes.

4. *The Chairman.*] You have seen in the newspapers the evidence we have taken, and therefore have an idea of the nature and scope of the inquiry, and doubtless can give us your opinion?—Shall I deal with the documents [Exhibits 1, 2, 3, and 4] I have been asked to produce?

5. Yes?—There have been three sets of rules [Exhibits 1, 2, and 3] issued. The ones with which I supplied you are the rules as they stand at the present time. Several amendments were made at a general meeting of members held in November last, and all those amendments are embodied in the rules as now printed, and with copies of which you have been supplied.

6. Mr. Ness was secretary at the time?—Yes; Mr. Ness, at the inception of the society, acted for a month or two, and then Mr. Rice was appointed.

7. *Hon. Major Steward.*] Can you indicate to the Commission the principal points of difference in the rules as they now stand and the rules as they were at the inception of the society?—Yes; I can go through the original rules.

8. The main point, as to conditions of membership, and benefits, and so on?—Well, the first alteration made was supplying members with medicine. When the society was first started the members were not supplied with medicine; but in May, 1893, an extra levy of 6d. a month was put on members, and they were supplied with medicine for this, and the married men were also supplied with medicine for their wives and families.

9. Was the scale of benefits as regards sick-allowance or death-allowance altered?—No; it remains as it was.

10. Has any alteration been made as regards the bearing of present Rule 5, which, as you will see, makes it compulsory on every employé to be a member of the society, subject to the exception afterwards provided, which is that exempting those already members of a registered benefit society? Has that been so from the beginning, or under the original rules were all compelled, irrespective of the fact of being members of a benefit society, to join?—Not since I have been secretary.

11. Then, so far back as October, 1892, when you joined, you found the rules on this point to be the same as they are now?—Yes; the members of friendly societies were exempt, and always have been. In connection with that matter, I might here make a statement in regard to the letter to the purser of the "Grafton" respecting Dorling in May last. You know the letter?

12. *Mr. Fisher.*] I wish you to be a little particular about the history of this?—Decidedly; I wish to be so for my own sake. I look upon it as the most vital part of the whole thing. In the first place, this letter was written by me entirely on my own authority, and it is unfortunate that I should have written it. However, the circumstances were these: This man Dorling entered the company's service about August, 1895—that was, about nine months before the letter was written. After he had been a month or so on the boat I wrote asking that he should be enrolled, and the purser replied that as Dorling wished, or, rather, intended only remaining in the company's service a matter of six months, he did not desire to join the society.

13. *Hon. Major Steward.*] One moment. I presume the first letter was the one set out in the evidence dated May, 1896?—No, that was not the first letter. There was a prior one to that. On the 11th September, 1895, I wrote to the purser of the "Grafton": "Please enrol E. Dorling as a member of the society forthwith." In reply to that the purser sent me a memorandum to the effect I have already mentioned—that, as Dorling only intended remaining in the company's service for about six months, he did not wish to join. When Dorling originally joined the company's service, and right up to the date of my writing the letter on the 11th May, 1896, he was always returned as belonging to no society, both in the purser's returns to me and, I am informed by the company's officials, in the returns of the chief officer to the company. Of course, I want to emphasize that fact. I had no idea he was a member of any other society. This is the first return [Exhibit 5] in which he is mentioned. In that return the word "nil" appears opposite that man's name in the "society" column, indicating that he was a member of no society.

14. *The Chairman.*] You think that inquiry would be sure to be made by the purser as to whether or not he was a member of any friendly society?—It should have been.

15. You do not think that a chief officer or purser would have made such a "nil" return without having made some inquiries?—It is not likely. I find that the pursers especially are very