

1250. They were cabled for a fortnight ago?—But Mr. James Bishop has been employed by your company for the last fortnight. He told me the matter was going to arbitration, so that does not look as though the company had cabled.

1251. I presume you will admit that it takes a little time to get explosives if they are not in the Dominion?—Naturally.

1252. And you realize of course that the miners will be out of work in the meantime?—I realize that the safety of the miners' lives is our first consideration.

1253. You realize that the men will be out of work?—It is better to be out of work than dead.

1254. So that it is not only the question of the company's profits and the month's coal?—I think I have already given you my answer to that—human life in preference to profits.

1255. Why was it necessary to introduce any references of a particularly offensive character in respect to the company's profits?—In the interest of truth and justice.

1256. What has it got to do with truth and justice?—Everything, in my opinion.

1257. Now, I want to ask you a particular question: you have known Mr. Fletcher for some time?—Yes, for eight or nine years.

1258. You knew him as manager of the State mine at Seddonville?—Yes.

1259. He was under you there, was he not?—Well, I was consulting engineer; he was mine-manager.

1260. And supposing he had remained in the service of the State, was there any prospects, so far as you knew, for him with his abilities?—Yes, he was a man that I always respected, and he did his duty well for the Government.

1261. Has he all the qualifications necessary for a successful colliery manager?—Mr. Fletcher has been surveyor at Millerton, and for a non-gaseous mine like that at Seddonville he was a good manager. I do not know whether he has sufficient experience in gaseous or dangerous mines.

1262. Have you any reason to doubt his integrity?—No, I have no reason to doubt his integrity.

1263. You realize that Mr. Fletcher is in charge of the technical work of this company?—Yes, he is in charge of the mine, but I think Mr. H. A. Gordon is consulting engineer above him.

1264. And that if the company has been guilty of deception, or of any other performance, as you designate it, he is responsible. The company itself does not conceal or do anything; it can only act through its agents?—It has neither body nor soul.

1265. Do you suggest that Mr. Fletcher has been guilty of all these things, as representing the company?—Apparently he has, as representing the company. My good opinion of him was formed in the past.

1266. You say that Mr. Fletcher has apparently done these things?—That is my opinion.

1267. You say that Mr. Fletcher has had no experience of a dangerous mine?—To my knowledge. He is only a young man, and has been in this country many years, so that he must have been only a youth when he came here. He got his certificate here, and if he came from another part I think he would be but a youth when he arrived.

1268. Do you suggest that Mr. Fletcher has not acted according to his knowledge and judgment as manager of this company's mine?—I do not like to suggest anything.

1269. You have been making the most astonishing statements in regard to the Taupiri Coal-mine, and the company?—I have stated facts.

1270. That is a matter of opinion, and it is not for you to decide; you have made extraordinary statements, and I want you to support those statements?—I have told you about the explosives and monobel.

1271. Do you suggest that Mr. Fletcher has not exercised his knowledge and ability with the best intentions?—I cannot say whether he has exercised it to the best of his knowledge and ability.

1272. Have you any opinion?—I would sooner not express an opinion. It is for the Commission to judge of certain persons' characters and abilities. I have given the facts; let the Commission determine whether those people are culpable or not.

1273. You have made these wild statements about the company?—They are not wild; they are true.

1274. Upon what evidence have you based these statements?—Which statements do you specially allude to?

1275. The statement that the company was guilty of concealing?—The company is responsible for the acts of its agent or manager.

1276. And you have shown that its agent or manager did not report two cases, but which cases were open to the Inspector?—Yes.

1277. Do you still say that the company was guilty of the offence of concealing those two cases?—Yes.

1278. You do not allow Mr. Fletcher to have any opinion as to what is a proper case to report under section 62?—Yes; it must be a serious case. I consider these serious accidents.

1279. If Mr. Fletcher, according to his ability, considers them not serious, and does not report them, do you still say that he was guilty of concealing?—Yes.

1280. Notwithstanding that he honestly exercised his judgment in the matter?—Yes, I say he was guilty of concealing.

1281. Is it usual for the Inspectors to institute prosecutions without the authority of the Department?—No, they write to the Under-Secretary for authority to prosecute and to employ a solicitor. The Government pays the solicitor.

1282. In regard to the prosecution of the manager, you will remember that Mr. Bennie, in his letter of the 7th August to the Under-Secretary, says, "I may fail to get a conviction, but the moral effect of such a prosecution will be to produce a more effective supervision the value of which we cannot