

438. How did it happen. Did the Government propose to make such an alteration if the difference was so small; they must, at all events, have been willing?—They were willing to make the alteration.

439. What was the difference?—I think it was only a halfpenny a ton.

440. *Mr. Fish.*] The whole length?—I am only speaking from memory.

441. Then, that is but approximate?—Yes.

442. *The Chairman.*] Have you any experience of the charge for haulage in Great Britain?—No.

443. There is an arrangement between the Union Steamship Company and the Westport Company in reference to carrying coal: do you know anything of it?—I do not know; that is outside my province.

444. What, in your opinion, would be a fair charge for haulage, looking to the wear-and-tear of plant on the railway?—For the ten miles?

445. For the ten miles?—I think that 1s. 6d. would be a reasonable charge.

446. *Mr. Fish.*] Including the use of trucks?—Yes.

447. *The Chairman.*] Could they do it profitably?—Yes; the railway at present is paying very good interest.

448. During the four years of your experience has the company had considerable difficulty in arranging so as to obtain the proper kind of machinery for getting out this particular coal?—The West Coast coalfields are excessively difficult to work. It is very irregular: the coal is broken up by faults. It is a most difficult field—one of the most difficult I have ever seen. I do not suppose there are any mines in the world situated like some of these mines on the West Coast.

449. Has the company been put to great outlay in making alterations?—Yes; they have expended a large amount of money in making alterations in machinery; also in extending roads over the field, and other works.

450. Can you reckon about what will be the cost of the improvements that are suggested by yourself as their engineer?—About £20,000; considerably over that possibly.

451. What kind of improvements do you refer to more particularly?—They have altered the whole system of haulage; that cost them £2,500 at one stroke.

452. What was the system originally?—It was an endless chain originally.

453. What is it now?—Endless rope.

454. But you estimate the whole of the improvements contemplated by you will cost £20,000?—Quite that.

455. They have built a bridge across the river?—Yes; they have also put up a branch-rope there; that work cost them £2,000. They have done away with the wooden mining tubs and replaced them by galvanised steel ones for taking the coal out of the mine.

456. What quantity do they carry?—Twelve hundredweight each.

457. Do they answer the purpose?—Very well indeed. Much better than wooden ones.

458. What other important improvements have you made?—The company have also extended their tramway to the far end of the lease of the Coalbrookdale property—about a mile up to the railway.

459. Then, you are working the Coalbrookdale property?—We have not commenced to work the coal yet.

460. Is that known as the Granity Creek?—No that is a different lease altogether.

461. But I understand that you are getting coal from the Coalbrookdale?—We have not commenced to work the coal yet. I am referring to a particular part of it; it is all called Coalbrookdale. The part I refer to is about a mile to the southward.

462. What distance is it?—One mile seventy chains.

463. Are you making any other extension?—Not at present.

464. I was under the impression that you were doing something at Granity Creek?—Not at present. I have made the survey for the incline there; the plans are all ready. The drawings for the machinery have been made and sent Home.

465. But you are laying down a railway to Coalbrookdale: what is the guage?—The same as in the mine—2ft.

466. When do you think that will be in working-order?—About the end of next month.

467. Have you ever brought the question of those charges under the notice of the Government?—No; but I brought them under the notice of the directors several times.

468. Do you think the charges are too high?—Yes; I think they are too high. The revenue of the harbour since 1885 to the 30th June last was £53,000. Out of that about £26,000 has been spent in sinking fund and other expenses of the Board. The amount to works account is £27,400. That is a proof that the Harbour Board gets nearly twice as much revenue as that expended for revenue purposes. As this is earned by the railway, the railway must be making a very good thing out of it. The harbour has just double the revenue required, so that they could very well afford to reduce the railway-rates.

469. There has been some change in the constitution of the Harbour Board lately?—Yes.

470. Have the works been progressing as energetically since that change took place?—It is entirely contract work now.

471. Have the works been progressing?—They have been putting out 600 tons of stone, as against 1,000 tons formerly; they are working principally on one wall.

472. Do I understand that, what with the charges the company have to pay for winning coals, the charges made by Government in carrying it by rail, and the price at which coal is sold, there is very little, if any, margin of profit left?—Very little; they have only paid $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. dividends since starting; one year they only paid $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. on the year; next year 5 per cent. That is a very small dividend for work of this kind.