

readily than others; and it depends upon a girl herself how much she earns. There is no reason why in three weeks to a month a girl should not earn from 10s. to 12s. a week.

674. *The Chairman.*] What is the average age of these girls?—We cannot employ any girls under sixteen years of age without a permit from the Inspector. All our girls are sixteen or over, unless the Inspector has given them a certificate to work. I do not think there are any under fifteen. They have also to pass the Fourth Standard before they can be employed.

675. *Mr. Hutchison.*] You say it has been distinctly proved in London, by inquiry by the Home Secretary, that there are no unhealthy conditions in a match-factory?—Yes; in a properly-built match-factory.

676. How has this been proved?—In sixty-two years we have had one case. I do not think it has ever been mooted as to the health suffering.

677. Oh, yes?—I have not seen it. I went carefully into the thing, and I saw the Chief Inspector of Factories in London on two or three occasions about this very matter, and I do not think it has ever been attempted to be said that the business was generally injurious to health. From my experience, I can assure you it is a mistaken notion that there is anything unhealthy in the process of match-making, save the dipping.

678. Have you any reports about it?—I have a *Times* extract, and I will look it up and send it.

679. I mean any official report?—The one in the *Times* is from official sources; but I should not like this evidence published. I do not wish it to get into the papers that Messrs. Bryant and May have had two or three cases in their factory. Two or three cases took place in their factory, but that was under conditions that should not have existed. The drying-rooms were connected with the main building, and some of the girls worked in a gallery around the main building under very bad conditions.

680. Are you conducting the business under proper conditions here?—Yes; fairly well, even in this building, which is not built for a match-factory.

681. Is it not a little box of a place, ill-ventilated?—No; it is not ill-ventilated. There are plenty of windows; and you can judge for yourself if you come and see it. The dipping process is done away from the building. It is a small factory, and not so well suited as I should like it to be.

682. Has the Inspector expressed his satisfaction?—Yes; or else I should not have been allowed to begin.

683. *Mr. Stevens.*] Do you know if there is another match-factory in New Zealand?—Yes; in Dunedin.

684. Have you any idea what number of hands they employ?—No. It is a very small place; but the Government have given them greater facilities than they gave me—they have given them the use of Government buildings rent-free.

*Mr. Hutchison:* Not rent-free.

*Witness:* I was told so.

*Mr. Philips:* It was stated that it was on their paying the insurance charges.

*Mr. Hutchison:* It may be so.

*Mr. Stevens:* Is there any difference in their price and yours?

*Mr. Philips:* They are only making tin boxes, and their price is exactly the same as our own. They fixed their list to meet ours.

685. *Mr. McGowan.*] You state, Mr. Bell, that the girls at first receive 6s. a week. Are there any who do not for some weeks make even that?—I reckon some of them do not make 2s. a week, although they are paid the 6s.

686. Have any left because they could not do as much at the piecework as would enable them to earn fair wages?—I cannot answer that, because I have not been there to know why they have left. Some of the girls are earning 2s. a day piecework now. If a girl likes to work, she can earn a great deal more than 6s. a week.

687. *Mr. Hutchison.*] Is this a London firm?—Yes, with branches here and in Melbourne. It is R. Bell and Co.

688. *Mr. Mackenzie.*] Is it not a fact that in other occupations girls work for a time at first without getting any wages at all?—There is another factory in this town where they only pay 4s. a week for so many months, and where naphtha is employed—a more disagreeable smelling business.

689. *Mr. Hutchison.*] They are learning a trade?—So they are in our business. Some of our girls at Home earn £1 a week.

690. *Mr. Mackenzie.*] Your industry pays, at any rate, as good wages as any other industry pays to female workers to begin with?—Certainly.

691. You say you are selling yours at 3s. 6d. a gross. Bryant and May charges 4s.?—It is the laid-down cost, and the agents sell at 4s. 3d. and 4s. 4d. I undertake to say our matches are as good as any matches that can be produced here, and equal in quality to what can be landed at 4s.

692. *Mr. Tanner.*] You used four terms in referring to girls' wages. You said, "they should earn," "they can earn," "they will earn," and "they may earn," but you do not say "they do earn." Would you object to produce a pay-sheet for any particular week, so that the Commission might see for itself the actual amount paid?—I have no objection; but you can scarcely judge from that, because many of the girls, as I mentioned, stop away, and the amount we are paying now would be scarcely a fair criterion of what we shall pay when the factory is working under proper conditions in the future.

693. To make the conditions more favourable, suppose we allow the matter to stand over for, say, two months, when the Commission reassembles here. Will there be any objection to producing a pay-sheet then?—No; I will do so. I only returned to Wellington last week, and I hope I shall soon be able to get things into better working-order.