

justify such a suggestion. Moreover, the loss does not lie in the lack of sufficient outside market, but in the cost of manufacture. We find that the best binder is pitch. The proportion of pitch used in the production of briquettes or eggettes is, approximately, 8 per cent. The average cost of pitch imported is £4 12s. per ton. This, on an 8-per-cent. basis of pitch, gives the cost of pitch per ton of briquettes or eggettes at 7s. 7·98d. The total cost of manufacture is 16s. 6·69d. To this must be added the cost of freight, handling, general trading expenses, interest, and depreciation, amounting to 11s. 3·5d.; making a total cost of £1 7s. 9·16d., leaving a loss of 6s. 1·3d. per ton.

It does not appear to us that any material saving can be effected in the manufacture. It was suggested that the labour of one man might be saved, but this would make no appreciable difference in the cost of production.

We were unable to obtain locally satisfactory quotations for pitch. The price quoted was much higher than that above mentioned, but even if pitch could be landed at half the former cost, which is impossible, there would still be a considerable loss on the manufacture of briquettes and eggettes with pitch as a bond.

We made inquiries into the question of other bonds, and it does not appear that any bond would enable briquettes or eggettes to be produced on a payable basis. One new patent bond was brought under our notice, with some reports thereon, but this was in the experimental stage only—that is to say, no quantity of briquettes or eggettes has been manufactured with this bond and placed on the market, the sample submitted to us having been hand-made in a laboratory. The cost of this bond, as estimated by the patentee, is about 2s. 3d. per ton of briquettes or eggettes, as against 7s. 7·98d. for pitch as bond, leaving an apparent balance in its favour of 5s. 4·98d. per ton. Excluding the question of a working profit, this saving would not meet the loss per ton on the manufacturing cost. We have no evidence of the calorific properties of briquettes produced by this bond. The most that is said is contained in a letter from Professor Easterfield—namely, that “the briquettes, after three days’ keeping, were sufficiently firm for commercial purposes, and burnt satisfactorily in an ordinary fireplace.” In the absence of a more exhaustive test and a chemical analysis of the calorific value of these briquettes this is not sufficient to warrant us in recommending this bond, nor is there any guarantee that briquettes or eggettes can be produced at a payable price and command a sale.

It has been suggested, further, that a more modern plant would effect a saving, but no definite evidence or opinion could be obtained on that point.

In view of the foregoing facts we have to report, briefly,—

- (1.) That there is at present a considerable quantity of slack going to waste in the Westport district; that at least 25 per cent. of the coal still to be produced in the district will be slack, and, in addition to this, there is a large area of unmined soft coal.
- (2.) That this slack and soft coal are suitable for briquetting, bunker coal, coking purposes, or to be used as fuel for a specially constructed boiler.
- (3.) That the cost of manufacturing briquettes with a pitch bond precludes the briquettes from competing in the market with coal as a fuel.
- (4.) That it has not been shown to us that any other bond is available which will allow briquettes to compete successfully against coal.
- (5.) That with regard to bunker coal and coke the market is limited, and we see no prospect of any great increase in the demand at present.
- (6.) That the new type of boiler above mentioned appears to be suitable for the consumption of slack or pulverized soft coal, but it is not at all probable that existing boilers will at present be displaced by the new type to any great extent. We would, however, recommend that consideration be given to these boilers where new boilers are being installed or old ones replaced by new.