

THE MIRFIELD GAS BILL.

The Select Committee appointed to consider this bill resumed its sittings at the House of Commons on Thursday, under the presidency of Mr. STEWART GATHORNE HARDY.

At the close of the evidence on behalf of the promoters of the bill, Mr. GRENVILLE SOMERSET, Q.C., said that he would prefer to address the Committee when the whole of the evidence had been given before the Committee. He then called, on behalf of the Ravensthorpe Local Board.

Mr. William Howgate, a manufacturer at Dewsbury, who stated that for a great many years he had acted as chairman of that body. He objected to the Gas Company borrowing money upon borrowed money, which he considered most unfair, and that they were making bad worse. It was the general opinion that they were exceeding their duty as a public company. Indignation meetings had been held on the subject, and a memorial had been prepared. Repeated complaints had been made in regard to the bad quality of the gas supplied. Being a large consumer, he had asked for a sliding scale of discount, but had been refused, in consequence of the great outlay in regard to Roberttown. He had made gas at the cost of 1s. per 1,000 cubic feet, with coal at 8s. 3d. per ton. The population of Ravensthorpe was about 5,000, but Roberttown was sparsely populated.

In cross-examination, he stated that he was a colliery owner. He recently tendered to supply the company with coal, but his tender was not accepted.

Mr. David Hanson, a member of the Ravensthorpe Local Board, said that he objected to the bill on the ground that the charge for gas was too high, for, in his opinion, it ought not to be more than 3s. 6d. He was opposed to the company having power to erect chemical works and increasing their capital.

Mr. John Ayrton, deputy clerk to the Ravensthorpe Local Board, produced a list of prices actually charged by other companies, but objection was taken to the comparison as having nothing to do with the case at issue.

The CHAIRMAN said that these statistics would have no influence on the Committee, and the witness retired.

Mr. Woodall, engineer and manager to the Leeds Corporation Gasworks, considered that the paid-up capital of the company of £43,000 was excessive. He was of opinion that there had been a wasteful expenditure in the past. The Ravensthorpe works were adequate to the present requirements. He considered that all that was required was £10,000 for ten years. He had made an estimate, and considered that 3s. 7d. per 1,000 cubic feet would be a fair price on the assumption that this bill passed into law.

Cross-examined.—He did not think that there was anything in the bill that would alter the capital if they had a sliding scale.

This being the whole of the evidence adduced on behalf of the Ravensthorpe Local Board, Mr. GRENVILLE SOMERSET, Q.C., addressed the Committee on behalf of that body.

Mr. LEDGARD, who represented the Mirfield Local Board, recalled *Mr. Woodall*, who stated that the highest price charged to the consumer was the ruling price. In Leeds they had done away with the discounts, and a uniform rate was charged, which was very simple and very popular in the district.

Mr. Armitage, Clerk to the Justices of Dewsbury, said that there was a strong feeling in Mirfield against the bill. The gas had been very bad, and numerous complaints had been made as to the quality. They were willing to pay a fair price, and leave the matter to be settled by arbitration.

Mr. LEDGARD addressed the committee on behalf of the Mirfield Local Board, and was followed by Mr. MICHAEL, Q.C., who replied on the whole case, contending that what was proposed was for the public benefit.

The Committee passed the preamble of the bill, and limited the new capital to be granted to £27,000, making the capital £70,000 in all, with the ordinary borrowing powers on the whole of the capital. They limited the rate upon the debentures at five per cent., and required that there should be no power of making the debentures into capital.

The bill as amended was ordered to be reported to the House.