THE GAS MONOPOLIES.

Continuation of the Investigation—Another Officer of the Never Yield Company on the Stand—Testimony of Victims.

The Legislative Committee having charge of the investigation into the operations of the gas companies continued the inquest yesterday and last evening. The committee thus far have labored most industriously and have succeeded in unearthing some important facts from the officers of the gas companies and from consumers. They commenced business yesterday morning at ten o'clock, by calling

H. P. McGowan, Secretary of the Harlem Gaslight Company, who was sworn and examined by Mr. Mitchell, chairman of the committee, testified mainly as follows:—I am a stockholder in the Harlem Gaslight Company; I am secretary of the company, and conversant with its business management; fifty dollars per share was the original price of the stock; it has recently been sold at 195 per cent; I receive a salary of $4,000 per annum; complaints often come from consumers; we give two notices before we cut off the gas; dividends are declared semi-annually; the largest dividend was declared in February, 1866; we issued an extra dividend of thirty-three and one-third per cent; the company was organized in 1855; the total amount of dividends declared is 156 per cent, an average of eleven per cent per annum.

Witness was examined by Mr. Bergen in relation to the photomerical tests made by the company, but no points of interest were elicited further than as given in the testimony of Mr. Balmore, engineer of the company.

By Mr. La Bau—We have about sixty and one-half miles of pipe; our original capital was $150,000, and it was increased from time to time until 1864, when it was made $1,000,000; the statement that we have never made any report is incorrect, as there was a resolution passed in March, 1863, by the Legislature ordering the company to make a report on all matters connected with the company; in reply to that resolution I made a report, which is now on file at the Assembly.

W. H. Davidson, being recalled, placed in evidence the transcript of his business; he had found that he was slightly in error; I said eight per cent was the greatest error I found; I find that there have been errors of nine per cent, and one as high as sixteen per cent; I read Mr. Roberts' statement, as published, but I cannot find any record in my office of it; it must be mislaid; I remember the case quite distinctly, but I have no official record of it.

William Lester, being sworn, testified:—Am deputy meter inspector; have held the office two years; I was working at the meter business before I was appointed; I test every meter before sealing it; a new meter may receive its usage on the way; very little will put a meter out of order; I have never received any consideration, direct or indirect, from any gas company; we do not charge anything for inspecting new meters; when a complaint is made about a meter it the person sends it to the office we charge nothing, but if Mr. Davidson sends a gasfitter to take it down he charges for the gasfitter's time; I am a gasfitter; do not work for any establishment or gas company; my time is chiefly occupied at the inspection; I receive $800 a year for inspecting; I was engaged at the meter factory before I was appointed about one week; I am not a meter maker, but am acquainted with the business; I am not a citizen of the United States; a gentleman in this city secured me the appointment.

Examined by Mr. Bergen at some length as to the method of inspecting and testing meters. The testimony on this point was not of any general public interest.

Henry Chauncey, of 25 Washington square, a stockholder in the New York, Manhattan and Metropolitan companies, being sworn and examined by the chairman, said—I am a director in the New York Company; I have been away in Europe during the past four years, and my brother has acted as my agent and has collected the dividends; I do not know the amount of the dividends declared; I would rather not state how much stock I own; I do not know whether I receive two or fifty per cent, but I think I have a good investment or I would not hold on to it; I can't tell anything specifically without consulting my books; I do not know the number of extra shares I have received from the company; I have not attended any meeting at which dividends were declared.

By Mr. La Bau—I am sure I have not received any extra stock or profit from the Metropolitan Company; from the Manhattan I have received the certificates of indebtedness; I would not like to hazard any statement in regard to figures, as I would be obliged promptly to come back and correct.

Witness—Am I obliged to answer these questions in regard to my private affairs? I don't think the committee has a right to ask——

Mr. La Bau—We do not wish to go into your private matters, but we ask you as a director of a public concern.

The Chairman—This New York Company is very unwilling to answer anything. The President won't answer anything without the authority of the directors and the directors refuse to answer anything.

It was finally decided to waive the question for the present, as the witness was evidently not acquainted with the affairs of the company in which he is a director.

John Firmin, a practical gasfitter, was called, and being sworn, testified that he had been twenty years in the lower part of the city, had given the application of gas his study. He went into a lengthy statement of his abilities and how much benefit he had done to those who employed him. He insisted that the management of the gas companies here was a "one horse affair, mean and paltry, and they do not furnish enough gas."

Several attempts were made to shut the witness off, by reminding him that it was necessary to be "as brief as possible," and once in a while by "that is all, sir;" but he was under a run pressure, and as he said was "full of it," and did not stop until he had said his say.

Dr. Elmer being called and sworn testified—I am a physician, and have given a great deal of attention to this subject of artificial light; have found that nearly double the quantity of gas may be made from the same quantity of coal, without increasing the expense, and give at the same time a better light, by utilizing the hydrogen wasted in the manufacture of gas; besides, the gas would be pure and would not be contaminated with sulphur compounds, like the other gas; my attention was called to the subject by the bad effects of the impure gas on patients; I have called the attention of the companies to the matter; they have sent committees to examine, but they have done nothing in relation to it; a company has recently been formed in this city; in Philadelphia the gas is supplied by the city, the same as the Croton water in New York; the illuminating power there is about fourteen candles; there is no doubt about the lime process being the best for purifying, but if the companies would use the lime and iron in conjunction it would do away with the offensive odor, and would not increase the expense; I have tested the gas furnished by the Manhattan Company and have found it generally fourteen candles, but very often it is as low as twelve candles; a good, fair quality of gas should be eighteen candle power; my tests were made at a distance of about 100 rods from the Manhattan gas works; I believe unquestionably that the gas companies could furnish a better gas at a more reasonable price than they now do.

Joseph Wood being sworn testified—I do business at No. 20 Fourth avenue; the person who had the place before me used the gas from the Manhattan Company three years; on September 28 I applied to the Manhattan Company for the gas; on the 28th October the inspector came and said the meter registered 34,000 feet; I said there must be something wrong about that; the inspector said he had nothing to do with the matter except to take the register; I went to the office and the bill was calculated so that the amount was $102 or $104; I protested against it and said the meter was wrong; I was told that the meter was tested before it was put in; I examined the meter and found the meter was an old one; on Thursday (I called before on Monday), I got a bill for $36 50; a man came to test the meter the day after the first inspection, and he took the index for that day and made it 500 feet; the next day another man came and found it 300 feet; we had used four burners less the second day; we have ten burners altogether; we were using the gas from about eight o'clock in the evening to about ten o'clock; I was told a few days after that the bill was forty-two dollars; on the first day the bill was made out at thirty cents a hundred, and the second bill was at twenty-five cents a hundred; I protested against the bill, as the man who was there before was not charged one-third that amount; I asked to have the meter tested, and the man who examined the meter told me it would cost me five dollars to have the test made; the company sent two men, who took away the meter without giving me any notice whatever; I received a notice from the attorneys of the company that if the bill was not paid proceedings would be commenced against me; the bills of the former occupant were generally about twelve or fourteen dollars per month; I am now using oil, and, although it is more troublesome, I get a better light at fifty per cent the cost of the gas.

Cornelius L. Everett, vice president and treasurer of the New York Gas company, being sworn and examined by the chairman, testified—I am vice president and treasurer; I supervise the accounts, but am not the bookkeeper, and therefore not familiar with the business; I am a stockholder; the last sale of stock I believe was 250; I think the receipts of the company the last year was about $1,500,000; I do not know that I can give any testimony further than the president has given; the president has entire charge of the affairs of the company; the secretary keeps the books and the minutes, and the vice president and treasurer merely receives the money, puts it in the bank and attends to the customers' accounts; I think Mr. Newcomb's testimony about the dividends is about right; the dividends are declared by the directors; the bookkeepers make out all the bills.

The Chairman—I want to ask you, as stockholder, director, vice president and treasurer of the company, who is the proper custodian of the books? A. The president.

I know nothing about the price of coal or expenses, as that does not come within my province; my duties are sufficiently onerous without having other matters to look after.

By Mr. Bergen—The reason why our stock is worth $250 is, I suppose, because it was never watered; our charter was granted in March, 1855; we have never made any application to have our capital enlarged by law; we are acting under the charter of 1855; the continued operations of forty odd years and the increased value of our property, I believe, are the principal causes of the present value of our stock, which is very moderate; I could not tell the value of the property, as that is not in my department, and I have not made it a study; we declare dividends semi-annually, and whenever we are rich enough we give an extra dividend; about the frequency of the dividends, that is a matter of opinion; the stockholders may think they do not come often enough; gas dividends are quite different from other dividends, as we are liable to be superseded by some new discovery.

The Chairman—So you think you ought to make as much as possible while you can.

Witness—Self-preservation is the first law of nature.

By Mr. La Bau—I think if we stopped business to-day our real estate might possibly bring half a million dollars perhaps more; I cannot say whether there is a million dollars in assets or not; I can't tell how the president could make it out; that surplus has certainly been accumulated from the profits of the company; we had a great deal of property in different parts of the city, New street and other places, where we had gas holders to equalize the pressure in different places; of course we sold those when property increased in value; this real estate was purchased out of the capital; if the statement made by the president be true that we have $1,000,000 of personal property we are richer than I thought we were; in accordance with the capital authorized by the law—a capital of $1,000,000—a dividend of $500,000 appears to be large; I could have ascertained these matters if I knew what was wanted.

Mr. La Bau—That arises from the position taken by the president on the first day—antagonistic at once.

By the Chairman—About the issue of any extra shares is a matter I must refer to the stock book for; we have no more stock than our capital permits; we had not a million in and we distributed the shares to make up the million; the capital paid in was $750,000; the extra issue was about five years ago; we had a reservoir in New street, two in Church street, two in Roosevelt street; the managers thought it did not fulfil the object for which the reservoir was intended; I don't think the district in the neighborhood has suffered much from the withdrawal of these tanks; I don't think there is much cause for complaint from the newspapers.

E. R. McCarthy, of the Hoffman, testified to good quality of gas furnished the hotel and fair bills.

J. F. J. Niques, of 372 Canal street, being sworn, testified as follows:—I am a consumer of gas furnished by the New York Gas Company; during the past five or six years my bills have been increasing so much as to make me believe there was something wrong; I asked for a new meter and got it, but with no difference in the result; the bills increased from four dollars up to twelve dollars and then sixteen dollars, and the month of February, a shorter month and with one burner less in use, the bill is over eighteen dollars.

Joseph Sampson, a stockholder in the Manhattan and New York companies, testified—Am a director in the New York Company; the dividends are declared regularly in May and November, five per cent each time; other dividends are declared when they have the means; there were four dividends in 1865; in May five per cent, another of twenty and another, I think, of twenty, but I am sure the dividends were fifty per cent in all; I should suppose the dividends would average that for some years—how many I do not know; the increase of the stock was made at the rate of one share to three; at the last sale of the stock I bought some at three hundred per cent; I do not know as it would generally be considered a very good investment; I have never been assessed for any improvements; there is a large surplus; my impression is that there is a surplus on the books of about as much as the capital; I think the last balance sheet shows two million dollars, which is one million dollars capital and the surplus; I have been a stockholder in the Manhattan Company some two or three years; I cannot state the highest dividends from that company; I received the certificates of indebtedness and seven per cent on it.

J. Henry Magonigle, business manager of Booth's theatre, being sworn, testified to the fact that there was no complaint to be made about the gas furnished to the theatre.

Being examined by Mr. Bergen, witness went into an explanation of the preparations made for the introduction of the new oxygen light into the theatre.

Moses Taylor, being sworn and examined by the chairman, testified—I am interested only in the anthracite coal by being a director in the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad, which is engaged in the anthracite coal business; the gas companies do not use that kind of coal, and therefore I know nothing of the prices they pay for coal.

By Mr. La Bau—I am a stockholder in the New York, Manhattan and Metropolitan Gas companies; I think the last dividend from the Metropolitan was twelve and a half per cent; the capital of the company is $2,500,000; I am a director and know nothing of the business of the company.

Witness testified to the dividends of the New York Company last year and to the certificates of indebtedness, which had already been fully explained.

Samuel Sloane being sworn and examined testified:—Am a director of the Manhattan Gas Company; I think received three dividends of five per cent each last year, but am not sure about that; I do not hold now any of the certificates of indebtedness; I had some but sold them; I do not know the aggregate amount of receipts or expenses or the number of consumers.

Thomas E. Morris, manager of the Waverley theatre, being sworn, testified—I have two complaints to make, one as manager and another as a citizen at my own house, No. 179 West Tenth street; about a year ago I was called away to Philadelphia, and was detained about a week; the collector called on Monday and stated that he would call on Thursday; he called on the day stated, and Mrs. Morris told him that I would be home on Saturday, and as she had not money at hand to pay, if he would call again on Monday he would be paid; on Friday two men came, went down into the cellar and cut the gas off; I applied at the office, and was told quite cavalierly to pay my bills promptly and the gas would not be cut off; the same thing occurred a few months since. At the theatre we had used gas some three days and the bill was about four or five dollars; we received notice that if the new occupant did not renew the deposit the gas would be cut off; I spoke to my backer, Mr. Reeder, and he said there was a deposit there already, paid by Mr. Leon, of $100, which had not been removed; I went to the theatre next morning and found the gas had been cut off and my men could not work; I immediately sent $100 up, but the company peremptorily refused to put the gas on again until Mr. Reeder, as proprietor, should come up and go through the forms prescribed by the company; we could not find Mr. Reeder that day, and the next day he went up and settled the matter; I have been a consumer of gas at my residence for several years; the bills were always paid promptly; they were formerly paid in the name of my mother-in-law, Mrs. John Bougham; the same person has been collecting the bills from my house as long as I have been there; I complained to the company also that my bills were two or three times larger during the past six or seven months than they were ever before; I thought there was something wrong about the meter, but the man whom they sent there said there was nothing the matter with the meter, and the bills still continue the same.

John R. Bouton, one of the editors of the *Journal of Commerce*, being sworn, testified that since Wednesday night last we have had no cause to complain of the quality or quantity of gas; before that we had serious cause to complain; sometimes the gas was so bad we were obliged to use candles; the quality of the gas is about the same in all parts of the house; the cause I believe is that the gas is poor; there was also complaint of the bad color from the gas which, by the way, is not noticeable since Wednesday; I do not know anything about obstructions in the pipes, but I only know the fact that the pipes have not been changed or interfered with, and now, since Wednesday, we have all the light we want.

At this stage of the proceedings the committee took a recess until half-past seven o'clock in the evening.

Evening Session—The Worse the Gas the Higher the Price—Further Revelations—The Brooklyn Gas Company.

Last evening the committee investigating the gas monopolies resumed its sittings at half-past seven o'clock.

Garrett N. Clute, of No. 279 West street, was the first witness examined. He deposed that he was a gas consumer, and had reason to complain of the charges made; on one occasion a man came to measure the gas and found that 500 feet had been burned; he came again the next week and said that 200 feet had been burned; witness told him that he was burning oil and did not use so much; he came afterwards with a new meter, and subsequently presented a bill for $3 30; that was an excessive charge, as nothing but oil had been burned. Witness then continued as follows:—I thought that the charge would have been only $2 45; I told him I would not pay it; he replied that I must see the president about it; it should have been 700 instead of 1,800 feet; in fact I did not consume as much gas as I was charged with; I told the bookkeeper of the company that I had not used so much gas as was set forth in the bill; when they brought in the bill I had only burned 700 feet, but they charged me with three times the amount; I have been a gas consumer for about two years; I used to burn gas in Albany and as many lights as I do here; the charge there was three dollars per 1,000 feet; I used from four to five lights this winter for about four hours; my highest gas bill in Albany did not exceed seventeen dollars a quarter, while here it was about fourteen dollars a month for the same quantity of light of an inferior description; the gas supplied me by the New York Company was bad, and several parties in the neighborhood complained of its frequently going out.

Samuel N. Pike was the next witness examined. He said—I have been manager of Pike's Opera House; I have observed, when I first opened my opera house, that my bills were produced weekly for a certain amount; I discovered that without any increased hours of performance the gas bill was gradually augmented; I also observed that the performance for four hours was cheaper than that for three hours; although there was no extra light used; the light was very bad, particularly on the stage; and I noticed that as the gas became worse the bill increased; I managed a theatre in the West, but I do not recollect the variations of the gas; my gas bills will show that the less time occupied by the performance the gas bill increased, and I believe the gas bill at the opera house is now increasing twenty-five per cent; I called the attention of the meter inspector to the bad state of the gas, and he said he could do nothing; the bill amounted to between $20 and $30 a week; it increased since I first commenced about twenty-five per cent; I opened the opera house on the 9th of January, 1868; my gas bills were higher in the summer than when the opera house was opened; at times the light was very dim, so as to occasion frequent complaints.

James Boyle, liquor dealer, of 107 Prince street, testified:—I commenced to burn gas on the 1st of May, 1860; my gas bill on January 6, 1861, was $15 96; the 11th January, 1862, $14 25; on 6th January, 1864, $17; January 4, 1864, it amounted to $18; January 6, 1865, $22 75; January 6, 1866, $27 13; January 6, 1867, $25 38; January 10, 1868, $19 23; January, 1869, $28 50; for the last three years I was obliged to close my store every night at twelve o'clock; previous to that I used to keep open till one or two o'clock and on Sunday till one o'clock; I had the burners changed twice; last year, when I saw the bills so high, I consulted a gasfitter and he told me to put in five feet burners; the bill in June, 1868, after we had the burners changed, was $14 65; I used to burn the gas about thirty or thirty-one days; now it was only used about twenty-six days in the month, but the gas bill nevertheless increased; I complained of the bad light, but when doing so I was informed that the defect could not be remedied and that if I did not like it not to burn it.

Israel Bucknam, of 112 Lexington avenue:—I lived there for the last ten years; my bills for the first few years ran from seven to nine dollars, and within the last few years have gone up to $21 30; I use four burners until ten o'clock; on one occasion, according to my request, they sent men to examine the meter; Davidson, the inspector, examined it, and said it was all right, and was surprised that I had burned so much gas with only four burners; my gas bill was going up so high that I was obliged to see to it, but nothing has yet been done to it; the general quality of the light is very poor; the gas has been very badly attended to; there was a smell of gas through the house on one occasion, and I got a man to examine the meter; I never complained to the company.

In reply to a member of the committee Mr. McGowan examined a patent burner produced by witness, and stated that patent burners were the best for the companies and the worst for the consumers.

John Bergin, of 291 Union street, Brooklyn, testified—I moved to Brooklyn fourteen years ago; I applied to the gas company for a meter; they stated they had a bill against the house which they would compel me to pay before they would give me gas; this was the Brooklyn Gaslight Company; they obliged me to pay a deposit before they supplied me; the charge then was about one dollar or one dollar and fifty cents a month; the highest bill I have from the company was seven dollars; we were told that we were paying too much for gas by a new company, who promised to give better gas, no deposits and cheaper light; I persuaded about twenty persons to cut off from the old company; this new company offered to furnish the city of Brooklyn with the best description of gas at one dollar and twenty-five cents a 1,000, and private consumers not to exceed two dollars and fifty cents for the best quality; while there was competition the gas was good; at first the bill was five dollars, and subsequently ran up to eleven dollars, although the consumption of gas was greatly decreased; I complained to the company, but got no satisfaction; the quality of the gas at present is considerably deteriorated by the dampness of the coal; they have now what is called a "blower," or exhauster, which they use for reducing the richness of the gas. The general rule appeared to be the worse the gas the higher the price. Witness then proceeded to describe the process of making, and pointed out some of the defects in its present manufacture.

The committee adjourned at a quarter past nine o'clock to meet in Brooklyn on Monday morning.

OTHER LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEES.

On Sewerage.

The committee of the Legislature appointed to investigate the sewerage system of this city resumed proceedings at the Fifth Avenue Hotel yesterday. The first witness called was Mr. Theodore Weston, of the Croton Aqueduct Department, and his evidence was of no public importance. The ex-Speaker of the Assembly, Mr. William Hitchman, was next called. He testified as follows:—

I have been a resident of New York for thirty-eight years; I know something about the sewerage system of this city in 1859; I was a clerk in the office of the Common Council; also clerk to the committee on health, on roads, on streets, and I think I was also at the time a clerk of the committee on sewers; at the time I speak of there was no particular system for sewerage adopted; it was adopted on application being made to the Common Council; the system so called was simply a series of terminations, and it was under the direction of the Common Council; it was not at that time usual for the property holders to be notified when assessments were to be made, for them to make whatever objections they desired if they had any; since that time it has become the practice to notify property owners whenever assessments are to be made; I know of many instances where sewers are laid down regardless whether property owners in their vicinity are benefited or not; there is such an instance now in Eighty-sixth street; in my opinion the tiles used by the Croton Aqueduct Department are altogether too small; they are only, I believe, twelve inches in circumference; I have known instances where the contents of the tiles were driven back into the houses from which they had come by reason of the tiles being too small to carry off the drainage; in certain cases I think illegal assessments have been made on property owners; there was a test case in the courts about five years ago, but what decision was given at the time I do not now remember; I think the present system could be improved upon by making certain sinks at given points where the solid matter could deposit itself and allow the water to run freely; the solid matter could be removed by well applied means; there ought to be one of these sinks in every sewer-age district; taken as a whole, I do not believe the present system could be much improved upon without revolutionizing it altogether.

Mr. Worthen, sworn—I am the engineer of the Board of Health; I consider the present sewerage system adequate to the necessities of the city, but do not think it complete or sufficiently extended; the marshy districts in the lower part of the city are not well enough drained at present, which want could be supplied by marginal sewers; I do not think that the filth about the piers is to any very great degree increased by the fact that the sewers empty into the river at their termination; the filth there is caused more by decomposition of the various matter washed ashore and falling into the river from the piers.

Theodore Weston recalled—The necessity for the transfer of the drainage of the Seventy-ninth street sewer to the Seventy-fourth street one was very great; the Seventy-ninth street sewer commences at the East river and runs westwardly to the Fifth avenue; it formerly took nothing but the drainage immediately adjacent to it as it ran the lines of the streets under which it passes; I think about 1857 a sewer was built, by order of the Common Council, in Third avenue, from Seventy-first street to Seventy-ninth street, also from Eighty-fourth to Seventy-ninth street; that portion of the first mentioned extending from Seventy-fourth to Seventy-ninth street was connected with the Seventy-ninth street one by a grade of about two and a half feet higher than the lowest yard it was to drain; in other words the drainage in Third avenue had to run up-hill; the Seventy-ninth street sewer two years ago had no other connection than that and was sufficient as far as it was concerned to carry off all drainage; it was, however, considered for its prospective uses inadequate and therefore it was determined to utilize one in Third avenue from Seventy-ninth to Seventy-fourth street, which determination was fully carried out; this change was considered beneficial to the property owners in Seventy-fourth street and they were consequently assessed.

Isaac B. Coleman, sworn—I am a civil engineer and contractor; I have been engaged in constructing sewers since the 1st of June last; I have also done work on the new reservoir; the outlet of the sewers I have been working at is from North river to Sixty-sixth street and Tenth avenue; there witness described the extent of the sewers in the district as covering 12,993 feet); the sewers are of brick and pipe; the brick being four feet of internal diameter; the pipe is from twelve, fifteen to eighteen inches; the brick sewers are two bricks in width; I have never heard the system complained of, nor have I ever heard of any difficulty arising from the sewer pipes; the Croton Aqueduct Department furnish contractors with the pipes used; I know of no instance where imperfect pipes were laid down; the pipes are always inspected at the place where they are to be laid before they are used; I could not, being no expert, give any idea as to the quality of the pipes; I don't know what percentage, if any, the Croton Aqueduct Department make in selling contractors the pipes; whether or not the present system of sewerage is adequate is purely a mathematical question, to which I would not give a direct answer unless after making correct calculations; in my opinion every inch larger than is necessary to carry off the maximum of water in the pipes is a great mistake, because when taxed to its maximum the contents are all driven out, but when the pipes are large and only half filled there is not sufficient current to carry away the contents; in other words a small pipe with a good current of water is better than a large pipe with a poor current of water; I never heard of the pipes breaking after they were laid; I don't think they would break unless they were rotten; and I have taken up pipes that have been under ground for fifty years and never found one rotten.

Egbert H. Fairchild, Mr. Coleman's assoc iate in business, was next examined, but his testimony was only corroborative of the latter's.

The committee then adjourned to to-morrow at ten A. M.

The Railroad Committee.

The select committee of seven on the investigation of the affairs of the New York and Erie, New York Central, Buffalo and Erie and the Hudson River Railroads met yesterday at the Fifth Avenue Hotel. All the committee were present, and the session was a prolonged and interesting one. Several of the most eminent railroad men in the country were examined and testified upon the subjects embraced in the resolutions of the Legislature by which the committee were authorized to make the investigation.

The committee decided to withhold the daily results of the investigation and the names of the witnesses for reasons which they content will be obvious.

The investigation took a very wide scope, and the testimony taken was very voluminous.

The committee in the afternoon were taken in charge by the Commissioners of Charities and Correction for a visit to the public institutions.

On Public Education.

The Senate committee on the subject of public education in the city of New York held an informal meeting at the Metropolitan Hotel on Thursday afternoon, but all the members had not arrived in the city, and consequently no organization took place. An adjournment took place until Friday afternoon, at three o'clock; but it is not expected that the committee will proceed to business until Monday next. It is composed of Senators Creamer (chairman), Kennedy, Genet, Hale and Thayer. They are attended by Sergeant-at-Arms Kemper.

On the Merchants' Union Express Company.

The Assembly committee, consisting of Messrs. Rea, of Ontario; Wright, of Monroe, and Husted, of Westchester, appointed to investigate the affairs of the Merchants' Union Express Company, met yesterday morning at the Metropolitan Hotel, but examined no witnesses. The committee were engaged during the morning in devising forms of testimony and suggesting names of witnesses to be called. It is not probable that the committee will examine any witnesses in this city.

COMMERCIAL AGENCIES.

Growth and Extent of Commercial Agencies in Our City—What is Promised and What is Performed—Kind of Correspondents Employed—Collusions of Fraud and Fruits of Petty Spite.

Commercial agencies are rapidly attaining in our city a marvellous height of power and prosperity. They are comparatively of recent origin. The first organized in this city, that used to be *vis a vis* to the Post Office, came into being long after that little old quaintly steepled Dutch church was converted to its present uses, and when the look of grim age stared one in the face from its brown front and gabled roof almost as legibly as now. As time has advanced others have sprung into existence, till now there are three large and prominent agencies of this kind, besides others of feebler growth. These larger agencies occupy colossal rooms. They have colossal desks. They keep colossal books. They do a colossal business, and their profits are colossal. Everybody knows the objects of these agencies, or rather the proclaimed purpose of their organization. They claim to be a vast bureau of information regarding business men, not the business men alone of our city, but the bold and far-reaching flights of their imaginative pretensions take in the whole sweeping range of our country, from Maine to California, from the precipitous banks of the swiftly flowing St. Lawrence to where the waters of the broad Pacific dash upon the extreme northern point of our lately acquired Russian American possessions. An examination into the working of these agencies, their *modus operandi* of obtaining information, the terms on which they impart this information and the extent of reliability of this information, are not without interest, and the facts elicited from such examination are not without their suggestive moral. The results of such examination, which we have been painstaking in making, and in writing the details of which we shall be equally pains taking to give the facts accurately. We shall now essay to unfold, with succinct brevity, and, we trust, with convincing proof that the progress and completion of our narrative will so plainly and palpably reveal the underlying moral that even those who run may read it.

WHAT THESE AGENCIES PROMISE.

They begin with promising a great deal more than it is possible to accomplish. They promise to give accurate information of the exact pecuniary status and reliability, as regards credit, of all classes of persons engaged in all classes of trade. These promises, as we have stated, embrace the whole of the United States—merchants and business men in every city of the Union, in every village and in every country town. How utterly impossible these promises are of fulfilment can be seen at a glance. Business fluctuates. Failure are constant and sudden. Those who are to-day riding on the topmost wave of seeming prosperity to-morrow are wrecked in the great sea of financial speculation,

—but even now worth this,
And now worth nothing—

as Antonio found when his ships had all miscarried and his bond to Shylock was forfeit. They assume to keep themselves continually posted and to be able to tell who are safe and reliable, who are shaky and doubtful and who are positively untrustworthy. But is is unnecessary to enlarge on this points. The promises themselves, it is clear, are as unstable and unreliable as those placed in the lowest niches of unreliability in their cumbrously imposing books of record.

BASIS OF PROMISES.

This branch of our subject I ada us to explain the *modus operandi* these agencies have adopted for acquiring their information which, as an assumed merchantable product of value, they sell to their patrons. They get it through correspondents. But what is the character of their correspondents, and how much reliability can be placed on what they write? This question, upon the answer to which hinges the whole subject as to the value or otherwise of these agencies, can be answered in two words—very little. They are mainly third-rate lawyers, or men who will grasp eagerly at any chance to turn a penny, the matter of turning is honestly being a consideration that in no wise troubles them, or certainly the most of them. Why do they employ such correspondents? Simply because they can find no others. Men of decent self-respect will not lend themselves to the mean system of espionage demanded of such correspondents; such Paul Pry procedure as prying through keyholes; such ignominious delving for records of mortgages; such sneaking inquiries as to the liabilities of their neighbors, such lynx-eyed watchfulness as to their habits. It is easy to see what power such unscrupulous correspondents have placed in their hands, and how likely, when opportunity offers, they are to use it for their advantage. We will explain how the thing is said to be done, and it requires no specially large acquaintance with human nature in its progressive stages of unscrupulous development to believe that it is done, and frequently done. The scene is a showy store of a newly fledged merchant in some smart Western city or town. Our correspondent knows the weak points of this young merchant—diminished capital assuming the style and airs of large and assured resources; an ambition for wealth that will not stop at any means to compass his desire. Enter correspondent, as cunningly crafty in speech and manner as he is unscrupulous and determined in purpose. He has a private interview with the merchant. He comes to his point by gradual approaches, with the shrewd skill of Iago working upon the weakness of Roderigo, and with that final powerful, clinching argument of the former:—

Put money in thy purse.

"You see what I can do," says this correspondent, showing the credentials of his appointment.

"Well—yes," responds the merchant.

"I can give you a character in New York," pursues this oleaginous representative of one of our city commercial agencies, "that will enable you to buy on credit any amount of goods."

"I see."

"Shall it be done?"

"Yes."

The bargain is made. Our correspondent writes a glowingly favorable account of the financial resources of the young merchant. This account is duly transferred to the records of the commercial agency here. The young merchant comes to the city; our merchants get a transcript of his record; he buys heavily on credit, and they don't get their pay. We imagine that it would take something more than a lightning calculator to estimate the multiplicity of just such cases. And here let it be stated that the agencies do not hold themselves any way accountable for the inaccurate statements of their correspondents. Another power for evil their correspondents possess, and that is purposely underrating a person's degree of reliability. A correspondent gets a spite against a merchant perhaps, and (a not unlikely supposition) because the latter would not trust him or sued him for a bill and he puts his credit down as low or good for nothing.

And it shall go hard,
But I will delve one yard below their mines
And blow them at the moon.

Thus resolves this basely ignominious creature. If he dare not put down the subject of his spite as utterly devoid of financial credit he will throw out hints after the manner of Polonius:—

——I know the gentleman;
I saw him yesterday or t'other day;
Or then, or then, with such or such; and, as you say,
There was he gaming. He's very wild,
Addicted so and so.

All this has its effect, of course, in buying goods here; and these cases, as regards getting at the aggregate of them, present another subject and opportunity for the lightning calculator to ventilate his special mathematical power. There are, unquestionably, honest correspondents; but, from the character of persons from which they have to be selected, it is impossible to place much dependence on their statements.

NUMBERS, CHARGES AND PROFITS.

There are no lack of numbers. The reason is obvious. Our merchants are made to believe that they are the recipients of large benefits at the hands of these agencies. Facts and figures are set forth in printed circulars, whose tendency and purpose are to carry such conviction. There is no way of getting at the precise number of our different city agencies; but the number is very large, doubtless embracing two-thirds of our entire mercantile community. For membership are charged various sums, ranging from fifty dollars to $150 annually, the latter, however, being the more prevalent charge. It will be seen from this that the gross yearly receipts of these agencies are very large. To the managers they are unquestionably most handsomely paying institutions, and it is also unquestionable that their organization is primarily for the benefit of the former, that of the mercantile and business community being a secondary affair. At all hours of the day—that is during business hours—the rooms of the various agencies are open for the visits of their patrons and their books likewise open for inspection. The rooms, as stated, are very large and have a perpetually bustling show of busy activity. A bibliomanist would be overwhelmed with astonishment at the immense display of immense books. Every six months printed circulars are sent to the members containing revised lists of the names contained in their books of record. These circulars only give an epitome of the more extended written statements. The degree of credit to be given to any given individual is designated by letters at the end of the name which symbolize all the various stages from good for any amount to good for nothing.

CANVASSING NEW YORK.

Our city is canvassed as well as other localities to get at the reliability of our business men. To show how our merchants dislike having their own financial affairs pryed into, though they are eager to avail themselves of the same prying propensities practised elsewhere, we will give a sample of the reception extended by one of our merchants to a representative of one of their agencies, as related to us by the merchant. The fellow commenced his inquiries with more zeal than judgment, however, in his mode of questioning.

"What do you mean by asking me such questions?" the merchant asked his visitor.

"I am getting facts for —— commercial agency," he answered.

"You get out of here or I'll kick you," continued the merchant.

The zealous representative of the —— commercial agency did not protract his visit or his inquiries. These investigations have more particular reference to new firms in the city. The sample we have given is doubtless a faithful exhibit of the popular sentiment in our city touching these agencies, and that notwithstanding so many take pains and go to the expense to avail themselves of their supposed benefits.

SUDDEN SHIFTING OF SCENES.

A country merchant steps into one of our large stores and is no doubt frequently startled at the sudden shifting of scenes. On his entrance he is greeted with bows and smiles and is kept in agreeable conversation till a messenger who, on his intimation of a desire to purchase a bill of goods, is immediately despatched to the commercial agency to get at his financial record, comes back with the reliable statement. If the statement is favorable to credit for a reasonable amount for reasonable time the smiles continue and the bill of goods is sold and duly booked. If the statement is not favorable then the smiles relax, and now comes the astonishment.

"How do you wish to buy?" asks the merchant; "for cash?"

"On ninety days," answers the unsuspecting visitor.

"Sorry, very sorry," says the merchant, "but our terms are cash."

"I am not prepared to pay cash," interposes the rural dispenser of assorted merchandise, from a handsaw to Honiton lace.

"Good day," says our city merchant.

"Good day," responds the visitor, and he is very respectfully but firmly bowed out of the place before he knows it. These things are of daily occurrence. There may be an assassin in the dark—some spiteful correspondent at the bottom of it—as described above. It is all the same. No one will object to take the cash of our country merchant, but he can get credit nowhere. The commercial agencies have done the business for him. Perhaps he merits it, and perhaps not. It is just as likely one way as another.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS.

Having filled the outline of special observations regarding special phases and characteristics of our commercial agencies, we might indulge to an indefinite extent in general observations on this subject. The great objection to them is the almost utter unreliability of the information they claim to give. Another objection is that through positively erroneous information large sums are continually being lost by our merchants through extending credits where none should be given. The mischief is, the agencies are in no wise responsible for such results. They give out their information, for it would not do to give it out otherwise, as its reliability is all that gives it value. Excepting as guides to further inquiry and information, and as furnishing an extended list of names to which to send circulars soliciting trade, these agencies are of no earthly use except to their managers, and to these are an eminently good thing.

VISIT TO A CONDEMNED MURDERER.

George S. Twitchell, Jr., in His Cell—No Hopes of a Reprieve—He is Resigned to His Fate.

[From the Philadelphia Evening Telegraph, March 5.]

By a visit made yesterday afternoon to Moyamensing Prison, during which we were afforded the opportunity of entering Twitchell's cell and talking with him, the following points, the publication of which can do no harm, were gathered. The main object of seeking the interview with the condemned was to ascertain from personal observation how Twitchell bears himself in view of his impending doom; his mental and physical condition; how he occupies his time; his ideas regarding his immediate future; what signs of contrition he displays, and to listen to anything he might have to say regarding the crime for which he is sentenced to death.

He is confined in one of the cells of the third or upper row of the northern corridor of the jail. Thither we were conducted by one of the prison officials. Before we entered we heard the sound of solemn psalmody to a familiar tune. The prisoner, in company with his spiritual adviser, the Rev. George Bringhurst, was devoutly engaged in singing the hymn "On Jordan's stormy banks I stand." His voice, his manner, his very look betokened sincerity. He was evidently earnest in his devotions.

It appeared on inquiry that Mr. Bringhurst spends two hours every afternoon ministering to the spiritual wants of Twitchell, and has done so from the day of the prisoner's conviction.

The latter apparently takes the deepest interest in the religious exercises conducted by his faithful spiritual attendant, and joins in the singing of hymns and offers extempore prayers with pious fervor.

We did not enter the cell until the sound of the singing had died away, and then it was that we noticed the devout air of Twitchell, which we have already described.

Mr. Bringhurst at once introduced us to the condemned. The latter rose from his seat, and after a hearty shake of the hand extended a cordial welcome in a frank, free, off-hand and cheerful manner. Seats were then taken, and after a quick scrutiny of the countenance of Twitchell we opened the conversation. As has frequently been said by those who attempted to describe the personal appearance, and especially the physiognomy of Twitchell during the progress of his trial, he looks far from the murderer. His face is one of intelligence, rather than ignorance; of openness, rather than treachery; of kindness, good humor, and geniality. He was dressed with scrupulous neatness and looked altogether as though he was just prepared to attend church or an evening party. His skin was clear and transparent; his hair nicely adjusted, and his eye bright and expressive. His manner was cordial, though calm and self-possessed. Making some remark in relation to the visits of the Rev. Mr. Bringhurst, Twitchell assured us that the two hours he daily spent with that gentleman greatly benefited him in two ways; they rendered lighter the depression of confinement and were of real advantage to his soul. In reply to other questions he said that his health continued good, although he thought he had lost flesh since his confinement. He generally retired to rest about nine o'clock, and rose about seven in the morning. He sleeps as soundly as could be expected without having the benefit of any exercise, and his appetite continued good.

Referring then to his trial we asked him if he was satisfied with the way in which his defence had been conducted. He answered that he thought his counsel had done all they could for him under the circumstances, and he believed his conviction was the result of the popular prejudice existing at the time against