

THE PRICE OF GAS IN HAYWARDS HEATH.

A FEW FACTS WORTHY OF CONSIDERATION.

Several inquiries have been made, and criticisms offered, as to the recent advance in the price of gas, and comparisons have been made between the Haywards Heath Company and some of the London Companies. It should be remembered that the London Companies advanced their prices in October, 1914, whereas no advance was made at Haywards Heath until March, 1915—when the price was raised 3d. per 1,000 cubic feet only. Had the Haywards Heath Company raised the price at the same time, and in the same proportion as the London Companies, it would probably have been possible now to make a small reduction. As it is, the Haywards Heath Company is pilloried by a small minority of their customers because they saved the pockets of the consumers longer than did some other Companies. Moreover, comparisons of the local Company with large London Companies is, to anyone with any knowledge at all of the gas world, ridiculous. The public may not be generally aware that prior to the outbreak of war the bulk of the coal used by the Haywards Heath Company came by boat to London, and thence by rail. Owing to the enormous increase of sea freights, the coal now comes from the collieries direct by rail. The London Companies have effected very large economies by purchasing their own fleet of steamers, instead of chartering them, whereas local Companies have been at the mercy of inland transport. When the output of gas locally has again reached the normal figure doubtless the price will come down. Against the increase in the price of gas, residents must put the reduction in the quantity consumed—due to the entire absence of street lighting—while in London and other towns a large proportion of the lamps are still used. Another fact lost sight of by most people is that Haywards Heath has enjoyed an exceptionally low price for gas for many years past, and that even now the following towns in Surrey and Sussex are all paying more for their gas than Haywards Heath:—Bexhill, Burgess Hill, Billingshurst, Crowborough, Cuckfield, Dorking, Hascocke, Henfield, Horley, Horsham, Midhurst, Steyning, Uckfield and Wadhurst. At Tottenham the price has just gone up 5d. and at Rotherham 10d. per thousand feet. The foregoing facts are not intended in any way as an apology for the recent rise in the price of gas in the district covered by the Haywards Heath and District Gas Company, but are given solely for the purpose of throwing a little "light" on a "dark subject."

HAYWARDS HEATH URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL.

THE PRICE OF GAS: A REQUEST IN THE INTERESTS OF CONSUMERS.

The monthly meeting of the Haywards Heath Urban Council was held last (Monday) evening, there being in attendance Mr. C. H. S. Ellis, J.P. (Chairman), Mr. H. M. Knight, Mr. J. C. Peach, Mr. H. Plummer, Mr. J. Finch, Mr. S. Kent, Mr. E. Muzzell, Mr. T. White, Mr. H. V. Vaughan, Mr. C. Sharman, Mr. C. H. Waugh (Deputy Clerk) and Mr. Geo. Plummer (Surveyor).

THE SANITARY, WORKS AND PLANS COMMITTEE.

This Committee met on August 14th. Present—Messrs. White (Chairman), Hiltro, Sharman, Vaughan, Kent, Muzzell, Ellis, Plummer and Peach.

SURVEYOR'S REPORT.

The Surveyor reported with reference to Western Road (Private Street Works), road repairs and infectious disease. He further submitted two letters he had received thanking the Council for considerate and skilful attention received at the Isolation Hospital, and the Surveyor was directed to forward copies of same to the Gackfield Rural Council.

The Clerk submitted letters received from the East Sussex County Council as follow:—

- (1) Re trucks drawn by locomotives on highways;
- (2) notifying that the County Council would be prepared to allow the use of tar-macadam in place of ordinary macadam during the current year;
- (3) notifying that the County Council would make a grant of £50 towards the maintenance of roads other than main roads.

THE PRICE OF GAS.

It was resolved that the Council be recommended to protest to the Gas Company against the further increase in the price of gas.

REPORT ADOPTED.

Mr. WHITE moved the adoption of the report.

Mr. SHARMAN seconded.

Mr. PLUMMER, referring to the Committee's recommendation re the price of gas, said notice had been given to further increase the price from 29th September next, and the Committee unanimously decided that a public protest should be made against the Gas Company's proposal. It might be said that the matter did not concern the Council, that it had no locus standi, but personally he felt very strongly that there were two grounds on which they were entitled to protest. In the first place, it was giving articulate expression to the strong feeling existing with regard to the proposed large increase among the ratepayers and residents generally, and in the second place the Council itself in ordinary times was a very considerable customer of the Gas Company. There was every disposition on the part of the Council to sympathise with the Gas Company in the increase of expenses which in common with everybody else they had had to meet, but he was bound to say there was a strong and growing feeling that the large increase foreshadowed was not necessitated entirely by the difficulties and the exigencies of the war. It was quite possible that some of the enterprises embarked on by the Company during the past few years had not been so successful or so remunerative as had been anticipated. In some large towns where the price of gas was less than at Haywards Heath there had been reductions made in the price. He felt very strongly they should ask the Gas Company to reconsider their decision, as it was against the best interests of Haywards Heath and the district generally that the price of gas should be raised to the price proposed. The Gas Company at present enjoyed a monopoly, but they might not always be in that happy position. When the war was over the residents might have a choice in the matter of lighting, and the proposed action of the Gas Company would go a long way towards bringing about a change in the existing state of things.

Mr. FINCH said he did not think the Council would alter the opinion of the Company. Their idea was that by raising the price of gas there would be so much more profit. It was the greatest mistake in the world. Good management would suggest cheapening, rather than increasing the price of gas. When things were made dear, people would immediately economise in that direction, whereas if things were made cheap people would go for them and be inclined to be even a little extravagant. The cheaper the price of gas the greater would be the consumption.

Mr. PLUMMER's suggestion was adopted by the Council, and the CLERK said he would express the Council's views in a letter to the Gas Company.

The Committee's report was then adopted. (On page 2 will be found an article headed "The Price of Gas in Haywards Heath.")