

Application for enforcement of an award is often made to the Inspector of Factories by an industrial union, under the idea that the Inspector can use the power with which he is endowed by the Factories Act to examine books, papers, wages-sheets, records, &c., of an employer in order that he may prosecute for a breach of award under the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act. This is not the case. The Inspector is expressly prohibited from using the power given him under the Factories Act for any purpose but the service of that Act itself, and he is punishable if he does otherwise. He may disclose nothing concerning which he has gained information while acting as Inspector of Factories. Nevertheless, if thought desirable, the law could be so amended as to give an Inspector under the Arbitration Act the same powers he now has under the Factories Act, and this doubtless would be of service in ascertaining whether a breach of award has or has not been committed.

The question of boy-labour is a very serious one, and full of difficulty. The glass trade in Great Britain, ruined through being made too much of a close corporation, is a striking example on one side, and its teaching is reinforced by the demands of parents, "What are we to do with our boys?" Strange to say, if boys are wanted they are sometimes difficult to get in New Zealand; but, few or many, the principle of their employment in skilled trades should be thoroughly defined and known. There is great objection to be taken to their too numerous admission if, as is forcibly asserted by trade-unions, it has the effect of flooding the labour-market with persons of the "cheap and nasty" variety. It has not been unknown in English industries that the wife and children (working at low wages) have had to be the breadwinners of the family while the father, out of work, sits in the empty house. Such a state of things is most undesirable, and a balance should be established of some kind between the journeyman and the apprentice. I am not quoting an hypothetical case when I refer to an instance of one colonial firm who, before the introduction of the Arbitration Court, employed three journeymen and twenty boys. These boys received no instruction of any kind worth calling by that name. The master was attending to the commercial part of his business outside and in his office. The journeyman would certainly not teach a boy in order that the latter should take his place at a cheaper rate as soon as competent. The result was that the general public were sacrificed, and an incapable, worthless crowd of "improvers" let loose on the trade. The unions generally ask for limitation of one apprentice to every three (or four) journeymen. Such an application is commented on by thoughtless persons as if the end of a skilled trade was in sight because there was only one beginner to each of the present workers. They do not remember that, as the term of apprenticeship is only for three or four years, each journeyman in the course of his working-life (say, forty years) sees ten apprentices enter the business at his side, and turn themselves into journeymen, thus giving an increase of more than three to one on the original number, or, if the journeyman's working-life is shorter than forty years, at least two to one. The above remarks apply chiefly to labour in the skilled trades, as in printing, plumbing, painting, &c., but there are many employments in which young people can be accepted and can carry on efficient work after a week's tuition if the following rule be observed: viz., Only that number of young persons should be continuously employed in any trade which that trade can absorb when such persons have reached adult age. It is the worst breach of political economies and greatest of cruelties to allow the young citizens of a country to waste their most valuable years in the promotion of a business which turns them out at manhood or womanhood to face the world in ignorance how to get bread. It needs no comment to show the injurious effect that would result.

Before leaving the subject of the labour of young people I may refer to reports in the public Press as to the overwork of school-children. It is asserted very positively (and denied as positively) that in country districts many children are systematically employed in milking cows and other farm-work for hours before leaving for, or after returning from, school. There are no statistics on this subject available for the Labour Department to produce, as none of the statutes the Department administers has any bearing on this subject. In one or two cases figures have been produced showing that it is impossible for children to pay proper attention to their lessons when wearied out with excessive manual labour. If this evil exists some preventive steps should be taken by the Legislature, almost insuperable though the difficulties may seem to be to provide that any law in this direction could be carried out. Public opinion and the fact that a law forbidding the practice is in force would have a salutary and restraining effect. The arguments used hitherto in favour of the children being permitted to work as well as attend school have little weight, for the same objections apply in rural industries as in those of towns. The conscientious parents who will not work their children too much on their farm are handicapped in competing against others who are ready to "sweat" their children, as in a town they would "sweat" their work-people if the chance was given. I quote from a recently published article on the subject of wage-earning school-children as depicted in the report of the Education Department.* The writer says,—

A boy of eleven is reported as being occupied from 7 in the morning until 9 at night. Another, aged thirteen, worked fifty-two hours per week, being employed by a moulding company, and attending a theatre for five evenings a week and half a day on Wednesday. A school-girl is stated also to have been expected to work sixty hours per week at trouser-finishing. Another worked sixty-two hours in a coal-yard. Four sisters, from eight to twelve years of age, worked at home forty-four to fifty hours wood-chopping. Two boys at a London school rose at 4 to clean lamps in a stable-yard, to groom two ponies, and generally to take charge of the stable. In the report of 1899 there is recorded an instance of a boy who left his home at half-past 4 every morning to wake up twenty-five workmen, who gave him a mere pittance for his services. He got back at half-past 5, and at 6 set out again on a round of newspaper-delivering which occupied him until 9 o'clock, the hour at which school commences in England.

* "Wage-earning School-children in Great Britain," by Thomas Burke.—*The Forum*, May, 1902.