

least, would cost us 3s. 6d. Then, again, to cover this seat would cost us 3s. To turn these legs, rails, and all these spindles would cost us another 2s. 6d. at the very least. A mechanic, to make that chair from the raw material—that is, to put it together—would take, in time, at least two hours, at a cost of 3s.; and that could not be done unless he was assisted by a little machinery. Then there would be a boy varnishing, and the finding of the varnish, which would cost another shilling. So that you see the total cost of such a chair, to be made here, would be brought up to 13s., while the merchant can lay down such a chair in Dunedin at 7s. We ask you, gentlemen, if these protectionist people want these goods to come into this colony. If these gentlemen want the public to pay 13s. for this chair, then I think the demand for such chairs will be very small indeed, because you will see at once that the public will have to pay nearly 100 per cent. more for the same article than they have to pay for it at the present time.

13. Your argument, as I understand it, is that the public, or, rather, the consumer, would have to pay more for a far worse article, simply because his power of purchasing would have been limited. In other words, what you wish to express is, that by depriving him of the opportunity of buying a chair for 7s. by raising the price artificially to 13s., his purchasing-power is reduced by so much, and he must purchase a worse and less comfortable article?—Yes; he must buy a very inferior article. If you will permit me, I will show you the small worktable we have alluded to in our remarks, and which a great many of our protectionist friends here say ought not to be permitted to come into this colony.

*Mr. Gillies*: I have just one remark to make in addition to what Mr. North has said about this chair. That chair, if made here for 13s., must be made of native timber. This one is of oak, and would be ten times better than that of native timber, on account of its greater strength and durability.

*Mr. North* [producing a table]: This table is imported. We call it an inlaid backgammon-table. This [opening the top] makes a card-table, and it may be turned into a lady's workbox in this manner [illustration]. Our protection friends say that these goods should not be permitted to come into the colony. Now, I can tell you from my practical experience that it would be impossible for us to make an article like that under £8 or £10, whilst we can afford to sell it as imported for £4 or £4 10s. What I am saying is borne out by facts, which I am strictly adhering to. I say, why should the public be debarred from purchasing that class of article simply because a few of the public clamour to have these sort of things prohibited? If it were made here it would be made after a style. It is impossible to make it here like that, because at Home this kind of marqueterie-work is a trade in itself. In England you could pick one hundred devices in this class of work. It would never pay any firm here—indeed, it would be sheer madness on their part—to attempt to erect intricate machinery to do the various kinds of work required to make this class of goods. I say, why should people here in affluent circumstances be saddled with at least 100 per cent. more on this class of furniture—the better class of furniture—simply as a matter of protection? I would respectfully ask you (since you have no doubt heard that there has been a hue-and-cry got up amongst the protectionists here—namely, “What shall we do with our boys?”) to visit our warehouse and factory, where you will see what our boys are doing, from beginning to end, in making the goods that we manufacture, and how we help to make them become thorough good tradesmen—I should say, good colonial tradesmen.

14. *Mr. Stevens*.] For what length of time do you apprentice them?—I may tell you that, although we have a large number of boys in our employ, we do not bind them as apprentices; that, we find, does not work in this colony. We take our boys for four or five years, and say to them, “We look to your parents; we morally bind you. While you are good lads, pay attention to your work, and do what you are told, you will be taught your trade; but if you do not do that, you will be turned about your business.” That is our system of teaching lads here to become cabinetmakers.

15. Is there no fixed time?—Yes; we agree with them for four or five years, according to how we take them. We start them with 5s. a week, and they leave off with 25s. a week, they getting a rise of 5s. every year.

16. When they have passed through your hands and become journeymen, what wages are they able to earn?—When their time is out we give them 8s. a day.

17. Is that the same wage as the others get?—Some of them get 8s., some 9s., some 10s., and some go up as high as £4 a week.

18. Are they paid by piece or weekly wage?—Some by piece and some by day work.

19. According to ability?—Yes.

20. I suppose those who receive £4 a week are very skilled workmen?—Yes; they are hands we have had many years—in fact, they are our leading hands.

21. Are the lads in those factories which employ labour-saving machines apprenticed at all?—I do not think a great many are. I may tell you that a great many of these lads are brought up in this way: they start with, perhaps, 5s. per week, and they are taught to run these machines. They perhaps stick to it for two or three years, but so soon as one of them wants to get a little more wages he is turned adrift, and another boy at 5s. or 6s. a week is put on in his place. In another ten years, if a system of protection is carried on here, it will be one of the greatest evils that we will have to put up with—namely, allowing boys to become mere tools, and nothing better. The same thing applies to other businesses. We cannot shut our eyes to what is going on, even now, in the boot and shoe trade, and in some of the factories it is the same thing. As soon as the boys are able to do clicking or sew soles they get turned adrift. What is the good of them? By-and-by you will not be able to find a man here who can make a boot.

22. You mean, who could make a boot from beginning to end?—Yes.

23. I suppose where they manufacture the commonest classes of furniture a boy is engaged in producing one particular branch of a chair, such as the moulding?—Yes.

24. In fact, he is not a furniture-maker at all?—No; they are not mechanics at all. If you were to give a table like that (which, by the way, has been made by our firm) to some tradesmen to make, I do not think they would know how to begin to make it.

25. I suppose that you make a great deal of furniture from beginning to end of New Zealand woods?—Yes, from beginning to end.