

great bulk of the community—not like the one down South, which can only be attended by the sons of the wealthier classes—one where the boys would be taught practical farming. Then the boys would be instilled with the idea that farming was a good thing, and would take to it. You want a farm on practical lines—one that would pay its own working-expenses, and would not be a burden on the State. Then you could instruct them into the principles of farming, and wean them from their hankering after a town life. For myself, I would like to make a practical farmer of my boy; but, unfortunately, there are not the facilities for giving him that knowledge. I would not like to set him cow-spanking and drudging sixteen hours out of the twenty-four for a number of years at little or no wages, and then, having gone through all this, that he would be unable to get what we call a fair rate of wages, because it is notorious that farm hands are the most ill-paid in the country. But, as matters are, I shall have to be satisfied, and give him a trade.

18. Even supposing the boys had a little drudging, would it not be better for them than working in town, and turning out half-taught tradesmen?—Yes; but we want something to popularize farming. We have our schools for mechanics, and other places such as technical schools, in the towns, where boys can better themselves at their trades; but we have nowhere where they could acquire a taste for farming; and under the circumstances they do not like to go into the country. But I believe, if a small vegetable-farm were established in connection with our State schools in each centre, where the boys could gain a knowledge and a love of farming, that it would be a great advantage to them, and materially assist in settling the country and making farmers of the rising generation.

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FRIDAY, 14TH SEPTEMBER, 1894.

JOHN RUTHERFORD BLAIR examined.

1. *The Chairman.*] Your name is John Rutherford Blair, of the firm of Lyon and Blair, book-sellers, printers, &c.?—Yes. And so far as my establishment is concerned, the provisions of this Bill, as I understand them, will simply close it, so that I do not know where to begin. I could not carry out the law under any circumstances under these provisions.

2. *Hon. Mr. Reeves.*] I should be glad if Mr. Blair could give a concise statement of the reasons why he could not continue?—It is provided that all the boys shall be apprenticed. I have a room in which seven machines are running, requiring machine-feeders and pressmen. These feeding-boys differentiate to other branches of the trade as they grow older; but if I had to follow the provisions laid down I would have to apprentice these boys, and would be saddled with far too many of these youths. Apart from the consideration of remuneration, which would simply mean a large loss in carrying on, under these provisions a man would ultimately be doing a boy's work, which would be a physical impossibility, because the boys have to be nimble-fingered, handling sheets of paper. That is one objection. Then I have three ruling machines, requiring three feeders and one taker-off. I presume I would be required to apprentice them also. I would be under the same difficulty with regard to the youths employed on ruling-machines as those on printing-machines. These would be in the same position as the other apprentices; after a time they would be grown-up young men, doing boys' work. The training they get while so employed is often the only discipline they get. Some leave to go to bookbinding, some to carpentering or other trades. Then I have two coloured stamping-machines, at which we have been in the habit of employing girls, but we found the work rather too hard for them, and have been endeavouring to substitute boys. We would have to apprentice these, I presume. The whole thing would be absolutely impracticable. I do not object at all to some of the provisions—for instance, the question of age. Even here a social question of great importance is involved. My own opinion is that youths of either sex should remain at school until fourteen years of age; but you have only to take the educational returns to find that a large percentage leave school about the age of twelve, so that between the age of twelve and fourteen years large numbers of children would seem to be idle. My answer is that they should not be allowed.

3. *Hon. Mr. Reeves.*] You would not abolish the Saturday half-holiday?—My own impression in regard to the Bill is that it will lead to such a state of things that men like myself will be displaced by big corporations. No one will care to continue in business under such conditions as this and other Bills contain, and the trade will pass into the hands of large corporations, who have neither soul nor conscience; that is how it operates under the protective system in America. Of late I have not been taking any apprentices, for the reason that we have been unable to control them; boys seem to think that when they are apprenticed they can do as they like. The only remedy we have, when boys misconduct themselves, is to take them before a Magistrate, and I object to being placed in that position, and now decline to take apprentices at all. I have four different departments in which junior labour of this kind is employed—boys and girls from fourteen upwards—and in all of these departments there would be the absurdities I have endeavoured to show. Outside the ordinary number of apprentices, we have girls and boys in the printing and bookbinding branches; we have three or four apprenticed at the present time. There are others we do not apprentice—we could not do so. As a rule boys are apprenticed; but I have not been referring to that class, but to the machine-feeders, &c., who, under this Bill, would have to be apprenticed.

4. *The Chairman.*] Have you any boys learning printing?—Yes.

5. *Hon. Mr. Reeves.*] But you say they "differentiate." Where do they go?—Some to carpentering, &c. If a boy is a good one and likely to become a good man, we give him the preference if we have a vacancy; but it is very common to find that after one or two years they do not want to remain. As an illustration, I would mention the son of a gentleman here whom I took for the binding department, in order to endeavour to keep him at home; and now he has insisted on going to sea. What can you do in such a case as that.