

shops. If a boy gets out of work in Wellington he tries to get on at any of the shops. And I know this : that those we took in were quite as creditable as those we turned out. I believe, in Wellington, masters are more anxious to turn out apprentices well than apprentices themselves are anxious to be turned out well.

22. *The Chairman.*] What would you consider a fair system for the payment of wages?—We have been paying £1 5s. and £1 7s. 6d. for the last part of the time. Speaking independently, and considering the circumstances, I do not think apprentices are worth more than £1 a week in the fifth year. Considering breakages and wastings, I do not think it is worth more. We came to the conclusion last year not to employ so many apprentices, as it did not pay.

23. Do you consider the percentage-rate a good one, or would you suggest any other?—I think it certainly should be left alone. You may see a lad who is poor and deserving, whose parents are not rich, and whom you think should get a little more. Others, again, have rich parents who can afford to pay a premium for their sons to learn, or, at any rate, the son of the rich parent should get less remuneration.

24. Then, you think it ought to be left to private arrangement?—I think it would be better not to dabble with the wages, but to leave the matter to adjust itself. I think if the class of wages got known about, people would pay accordingly, and act fair and square.

25. Would it not be possible to strike an average rate for twelve months, so as to estimate the number of men and boys to be employed?—Well, I do not think so. For instance, we might be lucky enough to get four or five contract jobs one after another; or we might be slack and other firms doing a lot of work. There is no stability about the thing, and no means of gauging the amount of labour required.

26. What is your experience about the boys—do you find that the number of boys glut the trade?—I should say there are too many boys in the trade compared with the men. Five years ago there were not too many; but boys who were apprentices then are now in their fifth year, and others are coming on. I think it would be far better if the Bill could stand over till things improve again. I do not think it is wise to harass the trade any more than it is being harassed. Engineering is not paying. I only know one or two in the colony who have succeeded; the others are hardly making a competency.

27. You have expressed the opinion that the tradesmen are growing in number more than the work obtainable?—This is not due to the apprentices. The apprentices find their way Home, and to foreign countries. Some of ours are now in India, and Canada, and the Old Country, and are doing well. This is due to the fact that if we get an apprentice we make it a rule to do as well as we can with them.

28. Do they leave the colony from inclination, or are they forced out to seek employment elsewhere?—Yes; they like to get to the Home shops to be finished off; and letters we have got from other parts speak very creditably of the New Zealand boys. In the blacksmithing business I do not think for sixteen years we have made more than two blacksmiths. The reason is that the blacksmith apprentice must have a helper. By the time you pay the apprentice, helper, material, and fuel, it does not pay to teach blacksmithing in an engineering shop like our own. In the boiler-shop it is something after that way too. The moulders' apprentices do not bear the proportion of men that would be reasonable, nor yet the blacksmiths. In the engineering the work is so erratic that it does not pay to have a large number of apprentices. The work comes on suddenly for a time, then all of a sudden it slackens, and there is not enough to keep going with. About the savings-bank clause: I think it would be very difficult to get the employer to collect the wages and put them in the bank. I think the Inspector ought to do that. This is a matter between the Government and the boys, and why should the master be brought into it at all.

FRIDAY, 28TH SEPTEMBER, 1894.

ALEXANDER OSBORNE examined.

1. What is your name?—Alexander Osborne.
2. What are you?—A bookbinder.
3. You have gone over the Master and Apprentice Bill?—Yes.
4. And made yourself acquainted with its provisions?—Yes.

5. Kindly give us your opinion about the Bill?—The evidence that has been given by the delegate from the Printer's Society, as to the evils of boy-labour in their trade, makes my task very much lighter in giving my statement, for the evils they complain of are substantially the same as the evils of the bookbinding trade—namely, we have evidence in our possession which goes to prove that employers have in many instances undertaken to teach boys their trade, knowing that it is not possible to fulfil their agreement with them. There are at the present time in Wellington young men who have been indentured, and are now quite incapable of doing journeyman's work, the same employers refusing to employ them on this account. Through no fault of their own, these men are now obliged to compete in the unskilled labour market, whereas they should, had they been taught their trade properly, be in a position to compete with competent journeymen. We are also in possession of facts from the South Island, where boys are in full possession of skilled work, without any indenture, which in fairness to the men should be performed by them. I allude to the paper-ruling, which is essentially skilled work, at which a number of machines are being worked by boys; and the men, who have taught the boys all they know, have been compelled to do labourer's work in order to maintain themselves and those dependent on them. The same applies to bookbinding generally. It has been forced upon us recently that the difficulty of obtaining work by legitimate tradesmen has become greater through this tendency to employ boys to do work which legitimately belongs to skilled tradesmen. Boys are taken on for a term of, say, twelve months, and are taught a smattering of the trade, and, when it is thought they are sufficiently acquainted with the