

system which has been recognized since the Middle Ages, by which artisans and mechanics were taught to become good and efficient tradesmen. Now, gentlemen, I want you to bear in mind—and I think it has been mentioned before—that it is not the Department which has taken up this attitude, but it is our own representatives, the last people in the wide world whom we would expect to do so. It is not those who are employing us—you can understand that; but fancy the very people who belong to our society and who are expected to represent us taking up this attitude and standing out against the right of tradesmen! Mr. Hampton said he did not think it mattered very much. If it mattered very little, why did he not put it through? We did not want them to force it on the Department: all we wanted was for them to bring it under the notice of the Department. We look on apprenticeship as the bedrock principle on which all tradesmanship is built, for, in spite of new methods, and notwithstanding the latest improvements in machinery, the highly trained and skilled mechanic is as important to-day as in any period of the world's history. I can say, further, that this great war has demonstrated that never in the history of the world was the mechanic so valuable to any country as at the present time, and surely we have the right to do everything we can to uplift the tradesmanship of mechanics. Now, the importance of the apprenticeship system was at one time not recognized very keenly in America, but during the last few years it has become more recognized every day. Up till a few years ago the enforcement of the contract of apprenticeship was not as strict in the United States as in the Old Country, and on the authority of men well acquainted with unionism we understand that imported men from the Old Country were in constant demand at the best wages in the United States, and this was a constant object-lesson to the American mechanics as to the value of a thorough training. Since that time the unions in the States have taken steps to look after the apprenticeship question. In the *Dominion* of the 15th June, 1916, appeared a statement made by the Hon. Mr. Barr. Speaking at the Conciliation Council in Christchurch he said, as far as I can remember the words, "The greatest acquisition that this country can have is well-trained apprentices and workmen." He says, "In this matter the British Dominions have been far behind the times, and I am hoping that New Zealand at least will be alive with regard to it." In all trades and in all countries this system is regarded as essential for the production of good and competent tradesmen. In England, Ireland, Scotland, United States, Canada, and all through the British Dominions this system is in vogue, and on the Continent they look on this system as being of more importance than we do. There is not the slightest doubt that the great industrial development that has taken place in recent years—a development which has astonished the whole world in a country which for the time being shall be nameless—has been due to a great extent to the manner in which they train their apprentices. Now, gentlemen, there is another aspect in connection with the importance of the apprenticeship system. You all realize that it would be absolutely impossible to watch the whole of every man's work. There are many little things a careless tradesman could let go, but owing to a great extent to the ideals which he has acquired while learning his trade his pride in his trade will compel that man to do a good job. Pride in high-class work still characterizes the skilled journeyman. Every true mechanic takes a deep interest in the general standard of workmanship for the entire craft, as well as pride in his own individual work, and that is the spirit we wish to foster. To be perfectly candid, we are not altogether disinterested. You may say, Why should you worry about the standard of the work? I will tell you: we want to raise the standard of tradesmanship, and we want to make the services of the mechanics more valuable to the Department. If we do so I have no doubt that the Department will recognize that our services are more valuable to them. We are not asking for everything and giving nothing. We want to make the services of the tradesmen of great value, and I am sure that the Department will be fair-minded enough to recognize that they are of great value. In protecting the standard of tradesmanship we are protecting not only our own interests, but the interests of the Department also, for you will recognize that it is essential for the good working of the service and the safety of the travelling public that the tradesmen's work should be absolutely above suspicion. The mechanic in the Railway service has to carry a good deal of responsibility, and if he is lacking in efficiency, or in that pride in his trade or that spirit which compels a good tradesman to do a good job, and he lets something go by, the consequences may be very serious. The tradesmen's work is peculiar in this respect: almost everything in the Railway Department goes through the tradesmen's hands at some time or another. The possibilities are great when you come to consider what may happen in the event of faulty workmanship. A faulty joint or weld, a badly brazed pipe, a loose bolt, or even a nut left off might mean not only a loss to the Department, but a great disaster also. Not only that, but we have to consider the responsibility of the tradesman from the financial point of view also, and here is where the financial responsibility comes in. Sometimes when a locomotive comes into the shop it is found that the cylinders are worn and require to be lined—that is, a bush is put inside. Now, first of all, this bush must be cast. After it is cast it must be sent to the lathe and turned down to the correct size, banded out to the proper size, and faced to the correct length, and then forced into its proper place inside the cylinder. That bush is held in its place simply by the fit. If the tradesman responsible for making that bush the correct size made an error of one sixty-fourth of an inch that job would be fit only for the scrap-heap. A job of that nature would take a fortnight to do, and if he spoilt it by an error such as I have mentioned the whole work would have to be done over again. In addition to that loss the engine would be delayed in the workshop for another fortnight. An error like that might mean a loss of £1,000. There is the loss of the material, the loss of the man's labour, and the loss of the engine when delayed in the workshop for a fortnight. That is the responsible work of the tradesman, and for that he gets 1½d. an hour more than the labourer. I do not want to go into technicalities, but I could show you that tradesmen in some cases work to one-thousandth part of an inch, and every day their skill and training