

THE CANADIAN MANUFACTURER

AND INDUSTRIAL WORLD.

DEVOTED
TO

HOME INDUSTRIES,
COMMERCE,
FINANCE,
INSURANCE,
RAILWAYS &
MINING.

VOL. II.

TORONTO, ONT., MAY 4, 1883.

No. 10

FACTORY LEGISLATION.

The Government must make a beginning with factory legislation, that is apparent enough. The growth of manufactures though the National Policy is what has made such legislation necessary: had there been no protection to speak of, our legislators would not have had to exercise their wisdom upon factory laws. The necessity for such laws is admitted, but we may easily damage some rising branches of manufacture by weighting them with too much legislation. And there are reasons why we should proceed cautiously. It might not be safe to assume that we have nothing to do but simply to copy certain factory acts now in force in England or the United States. In these countries manufactures are far older, stronger, and better established than with us; and consequently can stand an amount of interference that in Canada might do serious damage. This is really a point of great practical importance; and the more thoroughly we examine it, the greater will its importance appear. When conditions are more nearly equalized; when our Canadian textile industries have reached a development and attained a strength more nearly approaching what those of England and the United States have some time ago reached—then the same laws that are enforced there may be safe to try here. But, wonderful as the effects of the N. P. have been in four years, we submit that this is too short a space of time in which to build up our manufacturing interests to the strength and endurance of the gigantic concerns of Lancashire, Yorkshire, and the United States. It accords with reason and common sense to say that, in framing factory laws for Canada on models already in existence elsewhere, the different circumstances of this country should be carefully considered at every step taken.

With regard to one thing, the powers to be conferred on inspectors, probably more real practical interest attaches to that than to any other portion of the Act. To put the profitable conduct of a large business at the control of one official, or even more than one, is something not lightly to be attempted. At the Manufacturers' Association meeting on Friday last this was the point that, more than any other, drew forth the criticism of those present. It is easy to conceive of an inspector being a very well-meaning man; and at the same time insisting on changes which would cause great and really needless expense. With all respect to the gentlemen, as yet unappointed, who are to be made inspectors, it might still be in order to ask whether they are likely to understand all the

needs of a factory as well as those who are actually engaged in running it. Some requisites in the way of safety, sanitation, and convenience may be named in the act, and touching these the inspector's duty would simply be to see that the letter of the law was carried out. But to clothe the inspectors with arbitrary power to enforce important changes, dictated on their own judgment only, would be a standing danger to the successful prosecution of business. It seems clear that all changes involving much expense or annoyance to proprietors, and not specially mentioned in the statute, should be enforced only on report of the inspector, confirmed by the Governor-in-Council. This would be a salutary safeguard, and the knowledge that it existed would help to keep both proprietors and inspectors within bounds. The former would understand that if they opposed unreasonable objections against really necessary changes, a superior authority would promptly overrule them; while the latter would be equally aware that any excessive stretch of their powers would be promptly passed upon by the same tribunal.

With regard to hours of labor, some have thought it strange that they should be longer in the United States, where the workers are better paid, than in Europe, where they are worse paid. But the explanation is simple enough, after all. The large overplus of labor in Europe is closely connected with the shorter hours there, and is a principal cause of it. One of the very strongest arguments that helped to carry the ten hours' bill in England was this—that by reducing the number of hours, work would be created for many hands that before were idle. Say that in a certain town there were six thousand workers, but work for only five thousand, at long hours. Reduce the hours, and you thereby make work for the unemployed margin of a thousand; a most important and beneficial result, surely. This is what might easily have been found, and what has actually been found in Old England, many a time; and therefore a good reason for shortening the hours of labor. But in a new country like this the conditions may be very different, and in fact are so. The unemployed margin of skilled workers seldom exists here as it does there. This is the real reason why the hours are longer in American than in English factories.

This same fact—that of the existence of a large margin of unemployed labor—is the reason why, as we learn from Mr. Lukes' report, very few children are employed in German factories. The number of grown up people wanting work is always so large a marginal surplus that there is little occasion