

The Apprentice Question.

John McVicar, ex-president of the International Typographical Union, in his annual report to that body, at the twenty-fifth annual session, held at Louisville, Kentucky, June, 1877, made some pertinent remarks anent this vexed question. It seems strange that the combined ability of all the different trades cannot solve this apprentice problem. That an equitable system is much needed no one will deny. One that will protect the apprentice as well as the master and give *even-handed* justice to both.

Unless the different trades succeed in framing some general laws as shall put the apprentice in his proper position, give him his trade beyond a doubt, and make him serve his proper time in return therefor, the present "rule-of-thumb" system will have to work a cure itself. There cannot be much doubt that if the present mode is continued much longer there will be few if any apprentices to any trade. For few employers will risk taking a boy to learn a trade, because they will have no surety of him staying after they have taught him. To our mind there is a remedy near at hand: either from the action of the journeymen or apprentices. However, we submit Mr. McVicar's remarks in the hope that they will bear fruit:—

"That the number of apprentices taken, and being taken, to the printers' trade throughout our jurisdiction is far beyond the necessities of the trade, as well as in excess of the number to whom proper instruction in the business can be imparted, cannot truthfully be denied. But were we required to meet in the market, in competition for printers' labor, only the fruits of genuine apprenticeships—boys who had served their full term of apprenticeship and become competent workmen—even in increased ratio to the number we recognize as suitable, it would not be so bad as now, when, instead of an average of four years being spent upon an apprenticeship, the average will scarce reach two and one-half years, in which time, it is well known, no competent knowledge of the printing business can be gained.

"Though Young America is unquestionably opposed to restraint, I am satisfied that the best remedy for the evil referred to is an apprentice law in each State, by which it should be made unlawful to take an apprentice to a trade unless indentured, the employer being bound on his part to thoroughly teach the apprentice his

trade in all the branches carried on in his establishment; the apprentice being bound for himself, his parents or his guardian, to stay with and faithfully serve his apprenticeship to his employer. * * * * *

"One thing further in this connection, which may be done here, and which I think the necessities of the case require, is the extension of the term of apprenticeship to *at least five years*, to apply to all apprentices in our trade going to the business from and after this date. I know that some subordinate Unions now require a five-year apprenticeship, but nineteen-twentieths of our subordinate Unions require but four years, as the International Union law now reads *at least four years*. Make the International Union law read *at least five years*, and all subordinate Unions will increase their term in accordance, and thus cut off at least twenty per cent. of the increasing surplus of printers."

A Veteran Typo—"Daddy" Beers.

Among the veterans of the "art *typographique*" in Boston there is none more popularly known or revered by his associates and friends than the subject of this sketch, Mr. Hiram S. Beers, now employed as a compositor on the *Boston Herald*. For nearly half a century this gentleman has followed the fortunes and vicissitudes of the printing business, being twice a proprietor in that period. Mr. Beers was born in Taunton, Mass., in 1816, and began his apprenticeship to the printing business in 1832, with William Marshall, at Providence, R. I. In those days power presses were unknown, and apprentices had to learn how to "turn the crank and pull the bar" of the primitive hand press; and in this department Hiram soon became an adept. After about four years' tuition in the rules of composition and press work, Mr. B. was turned out "a full-fledged jour." Shortly afterward, in company with the late Clement Webster (editor of the defunct *Providence Post*), he embarked in the publishing business in Pawtucket, R. I., running a paper in the interests of the anti-slavery party. This venture did not "pan out" very well, and, after a series of trials and tribulations, the firm sold out the office. Mr. Beers then went to Boston and obtained a situation as a compositor on the *Air-cate*, in which office he remained for some time. Subsequently he took a "sit" on the *Herald*, a paper which existed in "the Hub" prior to the