

ner that during the previous fortnight he had attended six persons who had been similarly attacked after using the bath, and yet apparently had not thought it his duty to recommend the taking of any steps to remedy the evil. It should be remembered that ventilation is not all that is necessary in these cases, as carbonic acid gas and carbonic oxide are distinct poisons affecting the brain much as chloroform does, and not merely killing by suffocation. It is, however, quite possible to fit a gas bath so as to reduce the risk of the escape of the poisonous gas to a minimum, and no one should attempt to fit such a bath without a proper knowledge of the method.

### APPRENTICESHIPS—II.

It is generally supposed that Trades Unions still have restrictive rules with regard to apprenticeships which operate to the disadvantage both of employers and the public; and that these rules are enforced both in the limitation of the number which an employer may take, and as to the term for which they shall serve. In a very few trades, some half a dozen perhaps, such restrictions are nominally retained, but even in those the disadvantages are more felt by the workmen than by the employers, except in isolated cases.

We are, however, more immediately concerned with the building trades. These trades comprise six distinct branches, and employ probably 750,000 adult males. The operatives connected with these trades are located in every town and village of the kingdom, proportionately to the size and requirements of the several districts. In point of numbers and skill they stand second to none in our national industries; and hence their rules and modes of action affect more or less the whole of the trades of the country; the importance attaching thereto cannot consequently be overrated.

1. The masons for a great number of years took the lead in all matters affecting wages and conditions of work, and they endeavored to limit the number of apprentices to the smallest possible compass. From twenty-five to thirty years ago they even went so far as to prohibit their own members from teaching the trade to more than one of their own children; and even the one put to the trade was supposed to be regularly apprenticed. Of course the rule was evaded, nor was it possible to carry it out had it been right in principle. But it was not, and it failed in consequence. At the present time no actual apprenticeship is, or can be, enforced, the only conditions exacted for admission to the Mason's Society are: competency as a workman and the ability to command the current wages of the town or district where he is employed as a journeyman; these qualifications acquired, no matter how obtained, he is, if duly proposed and seconded and is willing to comply with the Society's rules, admitted as a member, and recognized as a journeyman stonemason. In some towns efforts have been made of late years to impose certain restrictions, more particularly in some parts of Yorkshire, but they have mostly if not altogether failed. These attempts have arisen out of local circumstances and customs, each branch being responsible for its own action in dealing with questions affecting the trade usages of the district. The Society as a whole does not, however, now attempt to enforce limitations as to the number, or to define the period which apprentices shall serve. The Scottish Union has long abandoned all interference in these matters, so that throughout Scotland the trade is virtually open to all comers without let or hindrance of any kind, either as to numbers or term of service.

2. The bricklayers have long since been compelled to abandon any pretence of limitation or restriction. What is known as the "Manchester Unity"—a society embracing most of the northern and midland towns—tried hard for many years to continue a restrictive policy but failed. Regulations were constantly inserted in their schedules, apportioning the number of apprentices or boys to the number of journeymen, and strikes in support of such schedules sometimes took place; but even then the number and conditions varied according to local circumstances and usages; uniformity being quite impossible, modifications were continually taking place, and it was at last apparent, to even the most obtuse, that the regulations could not be maintained. In the London district, and throughout the southern, eastern, and western counties the trade has for years been practically open without limitation or restriction. In the towns the trade has been recruited from country districts, the "wallers," as they

are called, becoming bricklayers when they migrated to districts where bricks were used instead of stone.

3. The carpenters and joiners have three separate unions—the Amalgamated Society, the General Union, and the Scottish Association, in neither of which are there any rules or regulations as to the number of apprentices or as to the term of service. Singularly enough the societies in this branch of the building trades were the first to relax their rules in this respect, notwithstanding the fact that not only is great skill required of the workers, but they have to find a considerable chest of expensive tools before they can take a position as a shop joiner. At the present time they not only do not attempt to interfere but they discountenance all regulations as to limitation of number or as to period of service. In some places there may be a kind of mutual understanding between the employer and those employed as to the proportion between apprentices and journeymen, but not as the result of coercive action. If a youth can "pick up" his trade, and he offers himself as a candidate for admission into the society, he has only to prove that he is able to earn the current wages and he is admitted.

4. The Plasterer's Society makes no attempt to limit the number of apprentices, nor does it seek to enforce a specific term of service. This branch of trade was at one time mainly recruited from Irish "hawk boys," but of late years these wondrous specimens of humanity have been to a great extent dispensed with. And no one in the building trade will much regret it, for they were the most mischievous vulgar-tongued set of young scapegraces that one could meet with in a day's march. Now the plasterers serve themselves for the most part, the laborers furnishing them with the materials. These laborers now, more than ever, are Englishmen; some may in time become plasterers. But there is an increased tendency in this trade to take learners for terms of from two to three years. The sons of plasterers seem to fill up the vacancies in this branch of the trade to a greater extent than in some other branches of the building trade.

5. The plumbers have been, and still are, more restrictive in their action than any other branch of the building trades. The reason for this has been that the master plumbers were anxious for their journeymen to keep plumbing as a close trade, and to a certain extent they have succeeded; but whether to the advantage or disadvantage of the public it is not for us to determine. Certain it is that a number of men call themselves plumbers who are not, in the best sense of the term, craftsmen; but these no doubt, have first of all learned a smattering of the trade as "plumbers' laborers," then started as handy jobbing men, and then have set up in the plumbing line on their own account. In so far as rules and regulations are concerned, the trade cannot be much influenced either way at the present time; and if we may trust to the complaints one often hears about the work done by plumbers, they have not improved in the quality or quantity of their work.

6. The last branch comprises painters, decorators, and glaziers, and to some extent upholsterers also; for the latter are called into requisition in connection with a portion of the builders' work in recent times. With regard to painters, paper-hangers, and glaziers, certainly little or no system of apprenticeship is in vogue; in the better class of houses some degree of preliminary engagement is no doubt enforced in the shape of improvers, but apprenticeship proper is not general. It would be far better for the public if it were; for the painter and decorator is, of all men, the most trusted, and every care should be taken to make him worthy of that trust. He has oftentimes the entire run of a mansion filled with valuables, so that his moral character as well as his abilities as a workman, is of importance when so much is at stake. By all the higher class firms these qualities are, doubtless, taken into account; but a system of regular apprenticeship would be a far better guarantee than any test as at present applied.

How far this loose system, or want of system, is conducive to the development of skill in the several handicrafts named is a question of much importance, and one that cannot long remain without an answer based upon ascertained facts. The continual complaints which one hears on every hand of bad workmanship in all departments of industrial life will force the hands of employers and compel them to take some action in the matter. Should this emergency arise, it is to be hoped that both parties—employers and employed—will co-operate to bring about a healthier condition of things. There is a growing disposition to seek and strive to obtain superior workmanship wherever possible; this feeling should be encouraged by masters and men, both of whom should combine in promoting a mutual understanding upon this subject.