

"FRENCH STEEL."

TO THE EDITOR:—The article upon "French Steel" upon page 637 of the May number of your journal reminded me of an experience that came to me in the summer of 1901. An agent exhibited samples of a French air-hardening steel of very good quality to the iron workers in Eastern Pennsylvania. While the steel was being exhibited at the Scott foundry in Reading, Pa., a corner of the tool broke off and the superintendent of the works "accidentally" noted where the broken piece fell. When unobserved by the agent he picked it up and preserved it in a properly labelled envelope. Orders for the steel were placed with the agent and in the course of time the material ordered was delivered. If I mistake not the purchase price was in the neighbourhood of fifty cents per pound.

The new material failed to act like the tool exhibited, so samples taken from it and the piece of steel saved by the above mentioned superintendent were sent to the laboratory of the Carpenter Steel Company, Reading, Pa. The results of my analyses showed that the steel delivered was merely an ordinary high-grade tool steel containing no "medicine" like chromium, nickel, molybdenum or tungsten, while the specimen tool was made from a high-grade molybdenum steel resembling in its properties the famous Taylor-White air-hardening steel. The fraud was at once exposed and the French dealers were the only losers by the transaction.

This information may interest you and the unfortunate who have been victimized by the swindler.

Respectfully,

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THE INCOMPETENT MAN AND TECHNICAL SCHOOLS.

TO THE EDITOR:—The conditions in this western country are such that a man can change his occupation at a moment's notice, there being a large demand for labour in any industry, and men offering their services without any previous experience. The result is that when the rush is over they are discharged, and they invariably drift from one industry to another.

Then there is another class who have learned some trade, or profession, before coming to this province. When they arrive here they find that there is no demand for their services in the trades, or professions, of their choice. What must these men do? No doubt large numbers join the ranks of unskilled labour; some obtain good positions; but the majority drift round from one industry to another and constitute the class of incompetent men.

Now what effect has this upon the industries of the country? Having no previous experience or theoretical knowledge of the work they are doing, such men when placed in positions of responsibility or trust in

our mines and factories, are a danger to the lives and property of others. An incompetent man in most cases must be a loss to his employers, no matter how cheap his labour, when skill is required.

Let us look at the case from the workers' standpoint. The skilled artisan who has learned his trade and follows it as a means of livelihood, is brought into competition with the incompetent. Now, while there is a demand for labour, the competent workman receives the most pay for his services, but when the demand slackens he is compelled to accept the same wage as paid to the inefficient men. Employers in most cases use the inferior man as an excuse for reducing wages. Trade unions, in order to protect their members in some industries, have adopted a standard, or uniform, rate of wage, and, in some cases this has proved satisfactory to all concerned. It has promoted a spirit of brotherhood so that the strong help the weak. In Europe this is the keynote of trade unionism; but a standard or uniform wage in this country under present conditions would be unfair to all concerned. Men who have spent time and money in learning a trade should be better paid than men who have had little experience. Still some recognized rate should be maintained—some locally fixed standard—for when no standard is recognized the conditions are generally unsatisfactory to both employers and employees.

A better solution of the question is the arrangement of a minimum rate to be agreed upon by both parties at stated periods, say, every two years.

While organized labour is seeking to improve the material conditions of members, it is their duty also to improve the mental faculties of the individual members as well. On the other hand, it is the duty of employers of labour to see that the proper facilities for improvement are provided. Surely educated workmen are to be preferred to careless and indifferent.

Manufacturers complain that they cannot compete against Eastern and European firms on account of the high price of labour in this province. There is another factor that has not been taken into account, viz., that others countries have educated their artisans along industrial lines.

What is needed in this country is that in every city, town, village and mining camp, technical schools should be open of an evening, so that every man may have a chance to improve himself in his craft. Not the trade school system as practised in the United States, but schools where men actually working at the trade of their choice may obtain that theoretical knowledge of their craft not to be obtained in the shop, factory or mine.

The trouble is that most employers of labour are apt to look on their workmen as so many hands, to be worked so many hours per day, for a fixed wage, no thought being given to their material or mental development. The result is in some cases no more work is done on the part of the men than is absolutely required; the work becomes to him a drudge. On the other hand let him be encouraged in his work, every possible means be placed in his way for his development, and while not solving the labour problem, it will promote