

## Our Portrait Gallery and Trade Unionism.



WE have received the following letter from a correspondent, which challenges an answer, so we give it publicity:—

49 Huntpill-street, Garrett-green,  
Lower Tooting.

To the Editor of THE BRITISH BOOKMAKER.

DEAR SIR,—I write to enquire if you gave the favourable account of Mr. Cedric Chivers' establishment, in your last issue, knowing that although he executes the work of one hundred and thirty public libraries and institutes, it is principally done by boy and girl labour? At the time I saw your account (January 4th) there were employed four men, eleven lads, and eighteen girls. Perhaps your representative can give the number of lads at the time of his visit; but, for argument, let us have the average for the last six months, and I am prepared to state that there are few such shops existing in the country where boy labour predominates to such an extent. I would also ask if 24/- per week is a trade union wage for a competent first-class extra forwarder—the price he pays to a man doing his best work? And yet you hold this gentleman up as a model to trade unionists. In your last few issues you have intimated that you would be compelled to draw attention to shops where unfair conditions existed where public libraries' work was done. I suggest this one for enquiry. I am doing my best in the interest of the workers, and shall draw the attention of the press to how public libraries' work is done. I may, perhaps, make matters clearer if I state that I was employed there for nearly three months as working foreman, but I soon found a schoolmaster was what was required in such a nursery. I was the third or fourth he had had on the same errand, who did not come up to his requirements. The trip cost me about £15, so I am not very well pleased; but I am not writing this from a vindictive motive, but from a sense of the injustice of your profuse remarks, relative to his supposed trade unionist principles. Of the eleven lads every one is fully employed I can prove. With the help of female labour, in laying on gold and setting up type, there are some four hundred library books, beside the extra work, turned out every week, and four men to do it! Are these fair conditions? I will thank you or "Will o' the Wisp" for a reply.

Yours respectfully,

W. T. EDEN.

January 27th, 1892.

In answer, we say that we have not "held this gentleman up as a model to trade unionists," nor made any "profuse remarks relating to his supposed trade unionist principles." What we have written, we have written, and our readers may judge between us. Except in the two last paragraphs (p. 132) we have dealt solely with Mr. Chivers' work, and we stand by what we have said. The last paragraph but one quotes Mr. Chivers' written expression of opinion, and not our own.

Apart from this, of what does Mr. Eden complain? That a competent man's wages there is 24/-; that boys are employed in undue proportion to men; that a female lays on gold and sets up type; and that altogether eighteen girls are employed. At the time of our visit, about the end of August last, we did not see anything alarming in the proportion of boy labour to that of men's, but it is not easy to discriminate between some boys and some men at a casual glance. As far as the girls were concerned, with the exception of the one specified, they were, we imagine, engaged upon female's work.

But assuming that Mr. Eden is correct in his statements as to low wages, boy labour and girl assisting at finishing, these same things occur plentifully enough in towns and cities where the trade union exists. In Bath there was no Society, no regulation wage, no limitation as to cheap labour, nor regulation as to

hours, and yet Mr. Chivers was the first employer in England to give the eight hours. If he was not induced to conform more to trade union practices, whose fault was it? Mr. Eden is a member of Society, did he complain to Mr. Chivers before his discharge? Did he strive to remedy the evils he saw? If he did not, has he any right to expect us to do what he has never set his hand to, and what his Society (the B. & M. R. C. U.) has failed to do not only in Bath but in many another town? We rather fear Mr. Eden is a better grumbler than a worker, for while he says "I am doing my best in the interests of the workers, we know of no proofs of it either in London, Bath, or elsewhere. Past records do not put his "best" efforts on a very high pinnacle from whence to crow.

We are firm believers in self-help, and shall at all times do our level best to forward the aims and objects of the trade societies, but in "showing up where unfair conditions exist," we shall not ignobly attack men for not conforming to Society regulations, where the Society fails to make the first effort. It is not fair to expect us to say what is, or is not, a fair wage, until an organised body of workers declare it. In some Society towns the minimum wage is quoted at 24/-, and Mr. Eden does not say that Mr. Chivers pays less. If, then, 24/- is fair in Society towns, why is it unfair in Bath? Has not Mr. Chivers paid more? For instance, what did Mr. Eden receive? And is not 24/- for 48 hours a higher and fairer wage than 24/- for 55 hours under the Society's rules? The fact is the B. & M. R. C. U. is lamentably wanting in many places. It is useless for that body to urge "We have tried to organise, but men won't join." The B. & M. R. C. U. wants shaking up. We have been in many towns where the Union is supposed to exist, and where the conditions are as bad as at Bath, and in many others where there are large numbers of binders and no Society at all. We have met bookbinding employers who have regretted the want of a Society, but it is not to be expected that they will coerce their men into union; and we have met others who are far and away beyond the crawling policy of the B. & M. R. C. U., and yet that body will not take their hints. Except in a few instances, there is no vitality in the B. & M. R. C. U. branches, and where there is, the exercise of their energy is impeded and retarded by the numerous dead limbs. The right place to lodge these complaints should be with the executives of the Societies.

WE have received from Herr Julius Engleman, of Berlin, "Engleman's Calendar for Book Printers, Type Founders, Stone Printers, Lithographers, and Wood Engravers," for 1892. It is a neatly got up, compact, and comprehensive little work, with the usual calendar, diary, and cash account arrangement. Besides these there are articles on "The Introduction of the French Normal System into Germany"; "Coloured Inks, their Composition and Manufacture"; "Rollers and their Composition"; "Gloss Inks"; "The Printing of Bronzes, etc."; and "The Handling of Paper before and after Printing." Some handy tables of wages and per centages are given, and the book concludes with a short digest of the most important laws in Germany affecting the trade.