

THE OBJECTIONS TO IT.

Probably the best method of recommending an eight hours day as a practical instalment of reform is to meet the arguments that have been advanced against it. In the absence of a more definite statement of the case against the Governmental enforcement of an eight hours day, the following may be given as the categorical objections:—(1) That it is impossible from an industrial and commercial point of view—that is, the business of the country could not be conveniently transacted under the eight hours system; (2) That it is economically impossible—that is, the employing class cannot afford to pay ten hours' wages for eight hours' work; (3) That if the workers want it they can get it for themselves—that is, by refusing to work more than eight hours a-day.

That it is impossible from an industrial and commercial point of view has never been shown. Those who urge this objection have in view the difficulty of managing distributive businesses from shops and warehouses, of running trains, and of working concerns—such as paper, gas, and chemical works, the Post Office and newspaper offices—where the labour is more or less continuous, and requires shifts or relays of workers to do it.

In the case of shops there certainly is a disadvantage attending the limitation of the hours. Early closing always carries with it certain inconveniences to the public; though to the shopkeepers and their assistants it is a clear gain. In this, as in many another case, we must choose the lesser of two evils. If the eight hours day becomes law it will simply mean that people will have to do their shopping early in the day; and, as the factories and workshops would close earlier, it would be possible for them to do that. Under the eight hours system operatives would begin work some hours before the shops were open, and the shops would remain open a corresponding length of time after the works had closed. The chief reason why certain classes of shops are kept open so late in the meantime is, not because it furthers public convenience, but because one grasping dealer, by keeping open late, forces all the dealers in his neighbourhood into doing the same, so that they may not lose custom. However, an Eight Hours Bill need not necessarily enforce the closing of shops. Let the owner of the establishment stay in it as long as he pleases; only make it illegal for him to detain his assistants longer than eight hours per day in his service. To ensure strict observance of the law, an increase of inspectors would doubtless be necessary; but in such a matter