

CANADA'S LUMBER TRADE IN 1893

Review of the Business of the year.

A RETROSPECT.

THE year 1893 was one of much anxiety to business men of all branches of trade, and in almost all parts of the world. It is very generally conceded, we believe, that in the United States and Great Britain, the financial depression was much more severely felt than here, and is apparently proving of longer duration. In other parts of the world, particularly, in Australia, commercial disaster in some of its severest forms has taken possession of the people, and it will yet be some time, we fear, before trade in that colony will have recovered itself.

It would be a strange phenomenon, if, with financial depression so wide spread, Canadian lumber, which finds a market in almost all parts of the world, was not measurably affected. Perhaps this stringency was the more felt by the timber trades of Canada from the fact that the year 1893 opened with many indications of a largely increased trade and at prices that would certainly have proved pleasantly remunerative. This view of the situation was reflected in interviews with prominent Canadian lumbermen in the early part of the year, some of the most cautious taking as hopeful view of the outlook at that period as was the case with others mentally built on a more sanguine plan. No one seemed to doubt that the trade would show a large increase over 1892, for the stocks of lumber on hand were very light, and values were steadily advancing. The mills of the Ottawa and the Georgian bay Territories opened with a large staff of hands in anticipation of a good trade.

Presently the clouds began to gather. The silver difficulties caused serious disturbance in monetary circles in the United States, and almost, as like a bolt out of a clear sky, we began to hear of this bank and another closing its doors, and for a few months, at least, a panic sharp and severe overtook business of every kind. Representatives of Canadian lumber firms, who had experienced no difficulty in finding customers for their lumber, were suddenly brought up with a short stop. Our lumber was wanted, but the one story was told in every ear. Money could not be had from the banks and consequently business could not be done. The piling grounds at all leading points in place of being bare, as had been the case the early part of the year, were now uncomfortably crowded with lumber. Lumbermen, generally, had, in fact, reached the point of not wishing to do business, considering it safer to hold on to their lumber than give it out where only paper was to be given in exchange, much of which was not negotiable, and nearly all of which was surrounded with doubt and uncertainty.

This was the condition of the lumber trade in Canada, as well as the United States, throughout the early summer of 1893, and which so continued, though in less aggravated form, along until the year had finally passed into the archives of the past. This remark, however, ought to be made, that whilst the depression in trade in the United States left its marks in Canada, at the same time the strain here was not as severe as there. As a matter of fact no serious failures occurred in the Canadian lumber trade in 1893, where not a few lumbermen of some importance and size across the border went to wreck within this period, unable to bear the continued strain put upon them.

Trade in lumber was likewise affected during the year by the slow moving features of business in the United Kingdom and other foreign points of export. It is doubtless true that very much was not expected of lumber in these places, from the fact that trade had been experiencing one continued series of set-backs for a long period of time. If it was not a London carpenters' strike, then things were all awry with dock men, and when the seat of trouble was not there it was somewhere else. Still the lumbermen of the United Kingdom had hoped that there was to be an end to these conditions, and we on this side of the Atlantic were not without expectations of improved trade as an outcome of this

hope. In Australia, of course, the bottom fell completely out of trade, and little lumber business was done. Things were not so bad in South America, and later in the year there were encouraging signs of improvement, but taking the year throughout only a fair trade was done with these points.

And yet, whilst conditions throughout 1893 disappointed hopes and expectations that had taken strong possession of the breasts of Canadian lumbermen, when they entered into the activities of business in the early spring, still this disappointment can only be temporary. As a Canadian lumberman remarked to the writer a few days since lumber in Canada is gold. The lumber trade has reached a point where any man holding Canadian timber need not fear any depreciation in its value. Where the sacrifices will come in, if anywhere, is in an injudicious or ill-advised disposition of these resources, a penny turned to-day, only at the sacrifice of a pound a little later on. But much of this kind of business need not be feared at the hands of Canadian lumbermen. They know pretty well what they are doing.

ONTARIO.

What we have already said in this review of the situation, taking the lumber field generally, applies quite fittingly to the Province of Ontario. Here, more than in some other provinces, the boom of early spring was actively felt. There had been a large cut in the woods and the drives came along in good shape. Mills started up with a strong force of men cutting. Lumber was much needed, for the piling grounds were devoid of almost any stocks. As a matter of fact there was so strong a confidence in the lumber situation, that large orders for lumber had been placed before the saw had, in many cases, touched the logs. Prices were not only firm, but for white pine in particular, were steadily advancing. It may be that this condition of the situation was in a degree abnormal. Some think so. At any rate there was no difficulty in placing sales for Ontario lumber at profitable quotations, until the financial depression seized our neighbors to the south of us. Then trade began to shrink, stocks piled up, and sales were comparatively few. The figures of the cut of 1893 would have run into large numbers, but the unexpected always happens, and a season that opened out unusually propitious, closed with dulness and inactivity as a prominent feature.

Opinions vary as to the probable effect of the present depression upon work in the woods this winter. It had been supposed, at the commencement of the logging season, that the cut would fall considerably short of that of a year ago, but from reports that have come into our hands the indications point to a moderately large cut. How well the logs will be got forward, having once been cut, is yet problematical. We hear of an over abundant supply of snow in some quarters hindering operations, whilst at other points work is retarded because of too little snow, mud and water being the substitute. It is always a matter of concern how the drives will come along when spring once opens.

QUEBEC

Returns from the Supervisors of Cullers' office at the port of Quebec do not record a trade of encouraging size for 1893. Of white waney pine there was only 2,460,541 feet measured and culled as compared with 2,659,166 feet in 1892; 1,120,697 feet of white pine, as compared with 2,310,081 feet in 1892; 393,391 feet of red pine, against 392,196 feet in the previous year; 573,079 feet of elm, against 198,806 feet; 158,285 feet of ash, against 198,806 feet, 140,909 feet of birch and maple, against 425,927 feet. In the item of oak alone there was an increase, the figures being 1,150,087 feet for the present year, as against 915,913 feet last year.

BRITISH COLUMBIA.

Commercial records show that the lumber trade of British Columbia ran into large figures for 1893. A leading Vancouver firm, in order to keep up with the demand, found it necessary for a considerable period to make double shifts by day and night. A great deal of shipping was also done there being gathered in the main harbor towards the close of the year the most numerous lumbering fleet on local record. But as Commerce, of Vancouver, has pointed out a large volume of trade does not always carry with it large profits. Says this journal:

"Trouble in Southern America and depression in Australia caused much of a large output to be sold to little profit. Over competition did similar detriment to the shingle trade. Quite a number of the smaller loggers, moreover, assigned during the year, and lumberers of this class now loudly demand in what they declare to be absolutely necessary self protection, the appointment of a Government log scaler, who shall authoritatively estimate the cubical contents of the logs, for which purchasers at the mill must pay." Taking British Columbia interests, however, as a whole, during 1893, they compare most favorably with, and were maintained on a far sounder basis than was the case in the neighboring State of Washington, where, as a result of reckless over competition in falling markets—by men and companies having in many cases insufficient capital—slaughter sales were general, insolvency frequent and demoralization in the ascendant. The establishment of the new fast steamship service between Vancouver, Victoria and the Australian Continent, should, moreover, give an immense early impetus to our lumber industries, by affording them ready access to a great, albeit at present, a temporarily depressed market, which has hitherto been mainly held and controlled by the lumber exporters of the United States. A close estimate places the cut of logs in British Columbia for 1893 at 120 million feet, of which 3 million were sold and shipped to Washington mills.

MARITIME PROVINCES.

For the very full information given below, touching the lumber trade of the Maritime Provinces for 1893, we have to thank Mr. J. B. Snowball, the well-known lumberman, of Chatham, N. B.

The winter of 1892-3 proved the most favorable for log-getting of any we have had for many years, consequently we have had a much larger output for the force employed, than we anticipated. Spring freshets were poor, and driving expensive. About ten millions superficial feet of logs were left in the brooks.

Notwithstanding the favorable season the export from this port fell off twelve millions superficial feet from last year. And while the exports from St. John were ten millions more than in 1892, still the exports for the Province show a decrease of thirteen millions. The increased export from Nova Scotia is caused by the excessive quantity of birch deals shipped from that Province.

The present winter is the most severe experienced for twenty years. Snow is now deeper all over Eastern Canada than at any time last winter. Operations in this district were entered into on a limited scale, and with an anticipated production of 25 per cent. less than last year, but the severe weather is likely to reduce the production below the estimate, and next year's export from this port must be small.

The proposed United States tariff, if adopted for wood goods, will have an indirect beneficial effect on the trade of this section of New Brunswick. Freight rates from Eastern New Brunswick to the United States ports are so high in comparison with those from St. John and Bay of Fundy ports, that our trade in that direction is about nil, excepting in laths and shingles, but under the proposed tariff the export of a considerable portion of the southern and western portions of this Province is likely to be attracted to American ports, leaving more of the trans-Atlantic trade to be supplied from this section.

France, Spain and Mediterranean ports have taken a larger portion of our exports this year than formerly, and if the "favored nation" treaty is ratified, as it will probably be at once, between France and Canada, a larger portion of our export is likely to go to that country, to the great relief of the English market, and with a fair prospect of better prices for spruce.

The stock of merchantable deals wintering here is 7,600 St. Petersburg Standards, against 7,000 Standards last year and 11,000 Standards in 1891. Logs are 4,000 Standards against 3,000 last year.

SHIPMENTS FROM MIRAMICHI FOR 12 YEARS, FROM 1882 TO 1893, INCLUSIVE.

1882—117 millions	1886— 72 millions	1890—88 millions
1883—149 "	1887— 68 "	1891—72 "
1884—108 "	1888— 73 "	1892—95 "
1885— 87 "	1889—110 "	1893—83 "