

AMERICAN OAK LUMBER.

TIMBER, of London, Eng., discourses as follows on American oak lumber. The criticism is rather unfavorable to Canada, but will not be without its value on this account. Says our contemporary:

A conspicuous development and important feature of the last quarter of the nineteenth century is to be observed in the increased importations of United States oak in contradistinction to, and competition with, that of purely Canadian wood. To those able to carry their minds back some twenty or thirty years, the metamorphosis will not only be apparent, but almost complete. During the sixties and seventies it was no uncommon sight, in the busy months of July, August, and September, to find fifteen or twenty Quebec sailers all discharging parcels of the prime Canadian white oak logs, the bulk of which were as promptly secured by the leading rolling-stock makers ex quay. At this period it was also a regular occurrence for the principal consumers to place orders with individual importing firms to the extent of 100 to 150,000 cubic feet. The timber quays and wharves of several of the larger British ports were often covered with the best and freshest products of the far-famed Canadian forests, which then knew not, nor feared, rivalry in any shape or form. Notwithstanding this state still obtains in a reduced form, there can be but little doubt that the old-time supremacy of the Canadian log trade has gone, and will never return. Why the exigencies of progress have compelled a departure so radical, is an ethical point upon which time and space forbid us to dwell. What actually remains of a former huge consumption in the direction named, is confined to

the relatively small demands of a few railway companies, who still believe it to be to their greater advantage to continue the system of themselves cutting up Canadian logs as required. This applies more strictly to those companies who not only repair, but build, the whole of their new plant, and who have learnt by long experience that length of life, rather than cheapness of material, is the real factor in the cost of permanent rolling stock. That Canadian wood still offers the better intrinsic value, with respect either to durability or expense, for railway coach and wagon purposes in particular, cannot be gainsaid. Moreover, it will be found impossible for other smaller requisites to exchange its reliability and tensile strength for that of a modern competitor, whose defects as well as merits we do not propose to overlook. What, then, have been the causes of the quiet, but nevertheless far-reaching revolution referred to? Cheapness, adaptability and economical machinery probably best characterize a reversal unique in the annals of commercial enterprise. A glance at the evolution of American forestry in general will show that the Canadian lumberman, together with his *via media*, the Quebec shipper, has virtually done nothing progressive during the larger portion of one hundred years, beyond cutting down the most suitable woods in the Dominion, hewing them into square or waney logs and rafting them for export to this country minus the cull pieces.

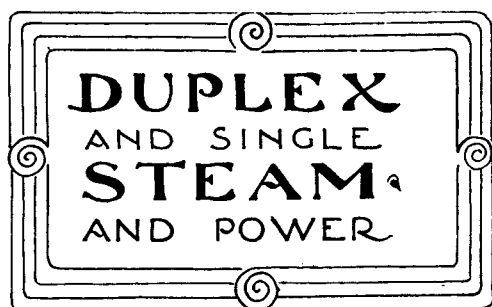
While it is true that most of the American pioneers in the oak plank industry, notably Messrs. A. K. Brown, J. Donaldson, and Edward Alcot, have practically become extinct operators, an army of small men have

rushed into the fray, some, it is to be feared, not wisely, but too well. So keen have the latest school of exporters become, that for months past they have given the English buyer the most hopeless hostages to fortune in their anxiety to realize their consignments on any terms. As previously pointed out in our columns, this has eventuated in serious depreciation and confusion, so much so that, unless a strong reformatory effort be quickly made by a majority of responsible shippers, irreparable injury must ensue. Is it not patent to all that as the edge of civilization becomes sharper, exactness and thoroughness are of necessity the great essentials to permanent success? If so, has not the time come when the technical details of foreign markets deserve enhanced attention? It is plain to the English trade that of the numerous varieties of United States oak, at least one half are unsuitable for conversion, and can never therefore be remunerative to shippers. Many recent parcels have consisted of poor, soft, red or brown wood, cut from low lying or swampy districts, and next to useless for substantial purposes. Of the endless other consignments, even of those sawed from the tougher and better grown white oak, there has been an utter lack of proper cutting and grading. This applies not merely to wagon scantling but to coffin planks, in which a big demand has sprung up, and where the need of careful quality and precise make is absolute.

The total import of United States oak into Great Britain is not much below 3,000,000 cubic feet, annually, and as its further increase undoubtedly lies in the path of sawed planks and boards, is it not opportune for American lumbermen generally to get close into touch with the stricter requirements of English buyers.

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