

A Growing Wholesale Centre.

The statement frequently made, that "Truth is stronger than fiction," has become a truism, and in reviewing a history of the new world, many instances will be found to verify this. Especially when we turn to the western portion of the North American continent and learn of its wonderful progress; of cities springing up as if by magic; of the peopling of whole districts, which were marked "unexplored regions" on the maps that we studied at school during our early childhood; of the establishment of thriving business centres, with all the bustle, confusion and excitement incident to the whirl of trade and commerce; with thousands and tens of thousands of busy people constantly thronging crowded thoroughfares; with their boards of trade or members of commerce; with their noisy ca. boards, where men congregate to speculate in grain and provisions, with stock exchanges, where wealthy men are sometimes made paupers, and occasionally a risky venture secures a competence in a day, in the latter instance almost sure to be lost in as short a time; with printing factories and workshops, whose tall chimneys send forth black clouds of smoke day and night, and where the wheels of industry never cease to revolve. And all this taking place within the memory of comparatively young men, and at a locality which a short time before was either primeval forest or virgin prairie. Is it any wonder, then, that the tales of Sinbad the Sailor appear to the reader as mild pleasantries in comparison with the astounding facts presented in the rapid development of the great West and Northwest?

While this development of comparatively unknown regions has been going on so constantly and rapidly, it may naturally be expected that wholesale commerce has also been expanding and branching out into new fields, and establishing centres of supply in the newly peopled districts. The march of commerce has followed closely in the trail of the westward flowing tide of emigration, and no longer are the cities of the Atlantic seaboard the sole and only competitors for the growing wholesale trade of the country. Towns of greater or less importance as wholesale centres have been growing up in the interior, and at points then regarded as the outside limit of organized trade, only in a short time to be succeeded by other centres further beyond these again. Indeed, eastern merchants have found it necessary to either move westward or establish branches at principal points in the interior, in order to protect their trade.

Twenty-five years ago such a thing as a wholesale centre could not be said to have existed west of the Mississippi River. Now, such places not only exist, but are numerous. St. Paul, Minneapolis, Dubuque, Davenport, Des Moines, Cedar Rapids, Council Bluffs, Kansas City, Denver, and probably a dozen other places of less importance, all do a thriving wholesale trade, and the number of such places is being constantly augmented. The wonderfully rapid development of the wholesale trade in the west, and the circumstances attending it, has been cause for surprise even to those best informed as to the abundant and varied

resources of the country, while the uninformed can hardly credit what has been published respecting its progress. Minneapolis, now the largest city north-west of Chicago, and the largest primary wheat market on the continent, dates its existence back some thirty years, while, with the adjoining city of St. Paul, the two form practically one wholesale and manufacturing centre ranking among the largest in the country.

Following the tide of commerce from the places just referred to, the next point of importance as a wholesale centre will be our own city of Winnipeg. Less than a quarter of a century ago the locality was known only to the voyageurs, traders and trappers of the great fur company which then held sway over the land, as the leading supply depot and head centre of the said company. The immense territory, which she now supplies with mercantile commodities, was known to the outside world as the "Great Lone Land," and to the Hudson's Bay Co. and its employees as a preserve wherein to carry on their trade in the furs and skins of the wild animals, which, with the almost equally wild Indians, were its only inhabitants. The one is now a populous and prosperous city, with a wholesale trade represented by nearly 100 institutions; the other, a vast region still sparsely populated, but dotted with thriving towns and villages, from the Red River to the Rocky Mountains, and from the United States boundary to the North Saskatchewan. Thus the great region, which was supposed to be so cold, barren and inhospitable as to render it unfit for the residents of civilized communities, has been brought under the sway of commerce, and can boast of a wholesale centre of no mean proportion, while the parties who were interested in holding the country as a preserve for the prosecution of its fur trade, and whose object was to keep the outside world in darkness as to its resources, are now sharing in its commercial advancement.

The history of Winnipeg really commences in the year of 1870, or at the time that the Northwest Territories were brought under the control of the Canadian Government. Previous to that time the trading post, which existed at the site of the present city, was known as Fort Garry. The Province of Manitoba was carved out of a portion of the Northwest Territory, Winnipeg was made the capital thereof, and forthwith she started on her career of development, commencing with a population of about 250 souls. From that time forward her growth has been steady and rapid. Anything like an established wholesale trade, however, cannot be said to have existed here previous to the year 1850. Before that date wholesale business, if it could be called such, was done by travelling traders, who, with ox-carts loaded with goods suitable for the wants of their Indian and Half-breed customers, or for the white residents of the few straggling settlements, started out once a year on their tours through the country. These traders, or peddlers as they might be termed, disputed the field with the Hudson's Bay Co., which was their only competitor. The capitalists who came here in the early days, were mostly of the barnacle class, speculators, who sought to increase their own wealth, without

regard to the prosperity of the country. Hence legitimate trade enterprises were frequently neglected in the furthering of wild-cat schemes of various kinds. Since this class of parasites have been shaken off, the wholesale trade here has made great strides in its establishment and development. During the year referred to, wholesale trade began to assume an organized form, and at the close of 1850, after a year of prosperous activity, the jobbing institutions of the city numbered about twenty. By the close of 1851 the number had grown to 50, and with the commencement of 1856 a total of 87 wholesale institutions were in the field.

In other columns of this paper will be found full and complete accounts of the establishment and development of Winnipeg as a trade centre, with special reference to the trade of the past year. To those unacquainted with the facts the story may seem extraordinary, but yet the development of wholesale trade here has only just commenced. The proportion which it may and will assume, is as incomprehensible to the uninformed as are the boundless prairies to the residents of the crowded countries of the Old World. It can only cease to expand when there is no further field for development in the mighty region, of which Winnipeg is the commercial capital. Situated in the centre of a continent, midway between the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, the gateway to a vast agricultural and ranching country which stretches a thousand miles westward, and nearly twice that distance north-westward, whose resources are only beginning to be known, her possibilities are truly illimitable. Then add to this the fact that, owing to the nature of the country to the east, Winnipeg is located at a point over 1,000 miles west of any place that can ever become a wholesale commercial centre of importance. A reference to one branch alone is sufficient to show what may be expected from the future, and we select the grain trade. When the central point or largest primary market for wheat commenced to be moved westward from the Atlantic seaboard, it followed the route of navigation along the great lakes from Buffalo onward to Chicago, where apparently a final resting place had been found. But how delusive this idea, for we find that, leaving the great lakes, the largest primary wheat market is now located at Minneapolis, a jump northward of over 400 miles. Another little skip of less than that distance will bring it to Winnipeg, whither it is now travelling. As a proof of this, it will be seen that our grain trade has already outstripped every other line of commerce, and is advancing with leaps and bounds. There is not only a possibility, but a strong probability that Winnipeg will at no distant day be the leading grain centre of the North American continent. With a railway to Hudson's Bay as one of the probabilities of the very near future, Winnipeg would undoubtedly become in a very short time, one of the largest receiving points on the continent, not only for grain, but other products, such as flour, butter, cheese, hog products, beef, hides, etc., and many other natural products of the great Northwest, which would be shipped by the shortest route to the Old World. In return manufactured goods would be brought in, and