

The Lumber Situation in British Columbia

IMPORTANT MEETING AT VANCOUVER.

The conditions under which the lumber industry of British Columbia is at present conducted are anything but satisfactory, and as a result the large saw mill of the British Columbia Mills, Timber and Trading Company at Hastings, a suburb of Vancouver, has been closed down until such time as there is an improvement in conditions governing the market. The bottom has, for the time being, fallen out of the foreign lumber market, and it is not possible to find a profitable market in the North-West Territories and Manitoba, largely owing to the fact that the mills near the border in the United States are using the Canadian North-West as a slaughter field for their surplus stock so as to prevent over-production in their own market. The British Columbia mills situated near the coast are more seriously handicapped than are the mountain mills, which are more favorably located to supply the North-West.

It is understood that the Pacific Coast Lumber Company and other large concerns have practically decided to close down at an early date unless some protection is afforded the industry by the Dominion Government, this being the natural result of existing conditions. The persons who have invested money in the business consider that the loss will be greater by operating the mills than by closing down.

At the last monthly meeting of the Vancouver Board of Trade there was a very full discussion of the present condition of the lumber industry, and the result was that a resolution was passed to the effect that an equalization of the duty between Canada and the United States is immediately required insofar as the lumber tariffs are concerned.

Mr. E. H. Heaps, of E. H. Heaps & Company, stated that up to the present time the lumbermen had been able to fight their own battles, but now they feel the need of the aid of every business man of the community. He did not wish to say that the lumber trade is bad or even sick; there are many seemingly bright prospects ahead, but the British Columbia lumbermen are threatened by American competition in the Northwest and in Manitoba. It has been asked why Canadian mills cannot compete with the American mills. The Canadians are discriminated against in many ways. The City Council had raised the water rates because the mills employed Chinese; the insurance companies had raised their rates, and the Provincial Government assessment had seriously affected the industry. The only manner of relief is to put a duty on lumber entering Canada. Mr. Heaps had reason to believe that between 9,000,000 and 10,000,000 feet of lumber per month was entering the North-West and Manitoba from the American side. If that trade were preserved to the mills of Vancouver it would keep all the mills running night and day.

The speaker said he had reason to believe that a duty on lumber could be secured if the matter were pushed. The British Columbia Lumber & Shingle Manufacturers' Association is doing all it can to bring about that end. The Americans have a larger market and cheaper supplies than Canadians, whose only large market is in the North-West and Manitoba. There are now many immigrants coming into the North-West, and the prospects for a large trade this year are good. The trade this year will be as large as last, but the great point is to hold it. The people of Manitoba cannot say that there is not sufficient lumber turned out in Canada to satisfy the demand, nor can they say that there is not enough competition in the country to keep prices down to a reasonable figure. A larger market is required by the British Columbia lumbermen, and if it cannot be secured the lumber industry will be checked.

PROTECTION NEEDED.

Mr. J. G. Scott, manager of the Pacific Coast Lumber Company, said that he was glad to see the Board of Trade taking an interest in the lumber industry, and the conditions surrounding it. The Government preceding the present one had placed lumber and shingles on the free list as a reciprocal action when the Americans had taken the same action in connection with Canadian lumber and shingles. Later the Dingley tariff had come into force in the United States and imposed a duty of thirty cents on shingles and \$2 on lumber, but Canada had taken no action against American lumber interests, despite the representations of Canadian lumbermen that a protective tariff should be established in retaliation. American competition has bothered Canadian lumbermen more this season than ever before. There has been an overproduction across the line, and foreign markets are slack. The Americans therefore use the North-West and Manitoba as a dumping ground for their poorer material, while they preserve their own country as a market for their best. It is true that Canadian lumbermen are invading American markets, but they are doing so in the face of the tariff.

FAIR PLAY ASKED.

Mr. C. M. Beecher, vice-president of the British Columbia Mills, Timber & Trading Company, said that all the lumbermen wished was fair play. He did not wish to mix politics with the discussion, but it was a fact that the lumber industry in Canada had suffered from the actions of the Conservative party. When the American free trade movement had come into effect the Ottawa Government had promptly met it and had reciprocated, and that was fair play, but in 1896 representations had been made to Ottawa that on the American side the Dingley tariff was to go into effect, and the Government had been asked to advise Washington that if the said tariff was placed against Cana-

dian lumber and shingles this country would be forced to retaliate, but no action was taken. Had their been, the American duty would never have been put on. The lumbermen in this country have repeatedly asked Ottawa to equalize tariff conditions, placing against the entry of American lumber such duty as the United States places against the entry of Canadian lumber into that country. This is all the lumbermen desire, and that is fair play.

Mr. Beecher said that few people realized the value of the lumbering industry to this province, but they would if they stopped to consider what it meant with its ramifications. If it is killed the people will be paralyzed at the effect upon the general prosperity of the community. Mr. Beecher said that he was not drawing upon his imagination in the relation of what the present condition of affairs is, but he was placing facts before the meeting and prophesying just what would happen in spite of all the lumbermen could do unless some measure of relief was afforded the industry. He said that the lumbermen in Canada face competition in the East from darkies and ticket-of-leave men, who work at very low wages, and in Manitoba they are face to face with the strong competition of the manufacturers of Wisconsin and Michigan, where lumber is manufactured much cheaper than it can be on this coast. The worst competition of all, however, is right here at home from the lumber mills in the State of Washington. The lumbermen in that state can operate their camps much cheaper than the lumbermen on this side can operate theirs, as supplies and everything else for mill equipment is cheaper by 25 to 30 per cent. than in this province. The Puget Sound mills have their own immense market of 80,000,000 people, and have Alaska, Hawaii, and now the Philippines. From 1894 to 1896 the Canadian lumbermen had a chance to do business in the United States, but as the American patronized home industry Canadian competition was unable to secure a footing there. The Puget Sound mills have the advantage in the cost of supplies and in their enormous home market, and they have the best of the foreign trade in Australia, China and Japan. It is utterly unreasonable that the Americans, having these enormous advantages over Canadians, should be allowed to ship into the only market the British Columbia mills have, a somewhat restricted area in the Northwest.

Mr. Beecher said the one matter of surprise to him was that the Canadian mills had been kept running, and he could only think that it was because the millmen here were a little smarter than the Americans. He said that the millmen had not come to this meeting as mendicants; all they wanted was fair play. He said he did not wish to close the Hastings mill if it could be helped, but certainly it would not be run at a loss.

SUPPLIES COST MORE.

Mr. J. W. Hackett, of the firm of Robertson & Hackett, sawmill operators on False Creek, vouched for the accuracy of all the remarks of the previous speakers. He said that the lumbermen in this country had come to be looked upon as a set of thieves. Everywhere he went he was asked when the price of lumber was to be reduced. Public opinion had formed the