

THE EXPORT LUMBER TRADE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA.

At the annual meeting of the Pacific Coast Lumber Manufacturers' Association, held at Tacoma, Wash., on August 22nd, an interesting address was delivered by Mr. R. H. Alexander, of Vancouver, B.C., who reviewed in an able manner the conditions governing the lumber trade of British Columbia. Mr. Alexander's remarks were as follows:

"When we get together we realize that there are troubles other than our own and I think the mere fact that the other fellow—who has been selling our customer lumber—has troubles of his own, in some subtle manner reconciles us to ours.

"When the formation of the Pacific Lumber Manufacturers' Association was first proposed I was not very much impressed with it, as I did not see in exactly what way we would be interested. Since its organization, however, I have been enlightened. In the first place we have our indefatigable secretary, Mr. Beckman, and all of our members know how he has helped us by compiling statistics and getting up price lists and furnishing us with information that we could get in no other way. It was only a short time after our organization that it appeared to several of us on the coast that through this association work could be done and something accomplished that had not been accomplished in all the years that we had heretofore been at work. Scheme after scheme had been tried with reference to the cargo business and after a very short time every one of them collapsed. It was only after the formation of this association at Seattle that some means could be devised to get the export mills into line and get them into the association, as well as those mills catering to the local and rail trade, but that has been done and has worked well, and while all these other schemes which generally originated with what had formerly been the headquarters of the export trade failed, the work put on foot three years ago by the founders of this association has proved a success—not only in the foreign trade, but I think the same can be said with reference to the local and rail trade, though perhaps the improvements have not been so marked.

"Before the association was formed everyone was working in a haphazard manner. Now, since the manufacturers have changed their views, wonderful changes have been made. The price list alone would show that. I can remember when everything in piece lumber from a 1 x 12 to a 24 x 24-40 feet was sold at the same price. By bringing the manufacturers together in this association the price list has been worked up which sets the price of the different sizes of dimension lumber at a figure commensurate with the relative cost of manufacturing it. I think in that line a wonderful advance has been made that has resulted in a great amount of good and profit to the manufacturer. The price list we have is the result of a tremendous amount of work on the part of those who have been instrumental in making it, and we now have something like a rational price on our product.

"At the commencement of the year we took up the department of inspection referred to, and

I am glad to say as one of the committee that it has met so far with gratifying results. Now, when a purchaser has been in the habit of buying a cargo and being able to grade it when it arrived, the man who sells it is going to have very little chance. At the same time the purchaser is not going to give up his former privilege in this matter without a struggle, and in consequence we must expect that there is going to be a certain amount of kicking before he takes the inspection of some one else, where before he had the whole say himself. So far, we have met with success. There have been fewer complaints with reference to the grade of lumber than there were formerly, and if there is a complaint you know that there must be something very queer about it, and it gives the mill shipping the lumber a chance to examine into the matter carefully.

"I trust that our inspection system will grow to the dimensions of that of the Yellow Pine Association, and I think by persistent effort we can make our inspection the standard. Work that has been done has shown the wonderful progress that has been made along these lines, and we are now inspecting practically all of our cargo business and our inspection is being recognized in most of the markets to which we ship.

"Referring to the statistics which were read by Mr. Griggs and prepared by Mr. Ames, there was one part that appealed to me especially and which was decidedly true, I am sorry to confess, and that was, that he could not get reliable information about the shipments. The trouble in British Columbia is that we are so far apart, some on the coast and some on the mountains. There is very little intercourse between the two and it is hard to get information that can be depended upon. As far as we can make out we have an annual capacity in British Columbia somewhere between 525,000,000 and 550,000,000 feet, and yet our shipments show only 275,000,000 to 300,000,000 feet. You see, therefore, there is much unused capacity there and the problem is what to do with the capacity. If hard times come, and there is a question that prices are not going to be so good as lately, I think the members of this association should recognize their friends and not bring the association into disrepute and possibly cause a great falling off in the price and make it difficult to get good prices. We certainly have to face the question that the mere fact of selling a little below the price will not increase the total consumption, and it merely means that A is taking such means to secure some of the business that was being done by B, and when B finds it out he puts his price below that laid by C, and C comes back at A and so it goes on and no one is the better for it.

"I think the manufacturers on the Pacific coast do not realize now that there is a value in standing timber which a few years ago was not thought of. The only question a short time ago was to manufacture as fast as you could get it into timber and you were all right. The manufacturers are now getting the capacity so far ahead of the consumption that the consumers are unable to take what is offered, and the thing to do is to curtail the output and wait

until the markets revive. There is no sense in giving away the wealth of our timber or in cutting it up and selling it and not making any money. If we can enlarge our territory by getting lower rates from the railroad so we can increase the consumption in that way, or if we can get lower rates on the common classes of lumber produced on this coast and can market it in localities from which we are excluded at present, I do not think there is any need for a decreased production. The great difficulty is that the heavy demand to the east of us is for the higher grades of lumber. We all know that we manufacture a good deal more of the common than we do of the higher grades and the problem is being continually forced upon us as to what will become of the rough lumber.

"The foreign business is restricted. It is true that it has increased but it has not kept pace with the increased capacity of the mills. In some countries you will find a gratifying increase in the records for this year, but if you look back you will find that the same country for the year before and probably two years before has taken very little from us and the increase for the one year is simply taking what they did not buy before. In Australia, which is one of our heaviest customers, the trade fell off something like 40 per cent. during last year. Of course that was on account of the hard times and next year Australia can show a gratifying increase; but it is not an increase on the whole, but merely evening up the trade with that country. Our great distance from many of the markets operates against us and it is difficult to send our lumber to those markets in time to satisfy the requirements of the dealers. They can get it from much nearer sources and they do not care to wait six months or a year for us to fill their orders. Our business has developed and our markets have broadened, but it has been a slow development and in the meantime the mills are increasing their capacity and there must be an outlet for their product.

"In reference to this I would like to say that I think there should be some respect shown for each other's territory. We are meeting severe competition from mills in this state that are sending lumber into Manitoba. The difficulty with us is the same as that with the mills located here. We have more common lumber than we can readily sell, and if you do send your lumber up there, we are both members of the same association, and I think we should respect each other's locality.

"They can take their share of it, but if they do, they should sell it on the same terms and at the same price that it is sold by the Canadian lumbermen.

"I am sorry that I cannot give you better statistics and more information in regard to the output of British Columbia mills, because it is just as I have stated."

"How to Measure up Wood-Work for Buildings" is the title of a book by Owen B. Maginnis, of New York, the price of which is 50 cents. It describes the simplest and most accurate methods to be followed when figuring up the wood required for either brick or frame houses, and is thoroughly illustrated. The publishers are the Industrial Publication Company, New York.