

One Hundred Years of Leather Making.

People have become so accustomed to seeing and wearing leather that it is satisfactory in every respect that it is difficult to realize how they managed to do without such splendid material 100 years ago.

Bark has always been a standard tanning material in the United States, and to-day it is still the chief tanning agent for the production of sole, harness and belting leathers. Bark-tanned upper leathers, while excellent in their day, have been largely replaced, however, by "combination" or sumac process, which is distinctly chemical. The old-fashioned tannery, with its bark mill, operated by horse power, has been replaced by machinery for grinding, sifting and rolling the crushed bark, so that it will more easily give up its tannin. It is not very long ago that tanners were content to make 200 pounds of sole leather from a cord of bark. To-day the figure is nearer 400 pounds of sole leather.

It is not more than 20 years ago that a young German chemist astounded our tanners soon after his arrival by proving that they were leaving a large percentage of tannin in their so-called spent bark, which was thrown into the furnace. Under improved methods of leaching, bark tanners can reduce the tannin in exhausted bark to about 1 per cent, and this small residue might be secured if the effort was worth its cost.

Chrome tannage may be safely put down as the triumph during the past century... the manufacture of upper leather. This is strictly a chemical method and has been mostly used in making leather from goat, kid, sheep and calf skins and cow hides. It is not employed as freely in tanning cowhides for upper leather, and its use in making harness, belting and sole leathers has been practically abandoned, as the special solidity required is better obtained from bark liquors. The pathway to success in chrome tanning is dotted with the financial graves and sepulchres of earnest and ambitious men, who were not destined to achieve the victory which fell to others. It was a struggle wherein men died of broken hearts, unable to reap the golden harvest of success.

Tannery architecture is vastly better than it was in bygone days. The modern tannery is not a foul smelling place, but clean and thereby healthy. Time was when cattle hair from tanneries was regarded as a field fertilizer, but that era of wastefulness is passed, and for plastering, felting, common carpeting and other useful purposes cattle hair brings considerable money to tanners. In like manner the fat flesh of hides and skins is boiled down and the resultant grease sold to soap manufacturers.

One of the striking changes in the tannery world is the increased tendency to employ the aid of science, rather than sneer at and reject it. It cannot be denied that years ago chemists with misdirected enthusiasm did foolish things in tanneries, causing severe losses and encouraging a wave of distrust among tanners which lingered for many years.

One hundred years ago a tanner would not have thought of putting his bark, water, oils, greases and tannery liquors under scientific supervision from time to time. The tanners of to-day are not content with chemical criticism of the materials they employ, but take pains to possess the best mechanical aids to success in their business.

The modern tanner of to-day is a great believer in machinery, and in line with this willingness inventors have been encouraged to burn the midnight oil for the benefit of the leather trade.

It is not so very long ago that it was customary among men to oil and grease their boots and shoes, particularly during the winter. It was part of the religion of many men also to wear boots, particularly during the winter. To-day shoes are purchasable at very reasonable prices which retain their comfortable softness and flexibility, no matter how often they may be wet. Women's shoes also are wonderful value to-day for moderate price.

It has been a quiet but eventful

century of progress in leather making, and it is difficult to see very much opportunity for further improvement. —Hide and Leather, Chicago.

India's Rice Crop.

The final general memorandum on the rice crop of India of the season 1900-01 shows that the area under rice in the three great rice-producing provinces, Burma, Bengal and Madras, is, approximately, fifty million acres, a smaller area by about two million acres than that sown last year. The yield is estimated at 22,000,000 tons. This is about 3 per cent. less than last year, and also a little less than the average. The area under cotton is about a fifth larger than last year, but still a little larger than the average. The yield is very much larger than last year, when the conditions were disastrously bad in Western and Central India. The exports to foreign countries during the present year have seriously declined, as a result of the small quantity available from last year's extremely bad crop and of the great increase in price; however, a material recovery in the trade may now confidently be anticipated. With regard to the sugar-cane crop of 1900-01, the area under crop is slightly smaller than it was last year, but the season was, on the whole, favorable to the crop, while last year it was extremely bad. Consequently, a yield of 50% million cwt. is expected in Bengal, the Northwest Provinces and Oudh, and the Punjab, the yield last year being only 37 million cwt. Of course, this estimate of 2,537,000 tons by no means represents the total yield of cane sugar in India. No estimate of quantity is given by Madras, and, in fact, such an estimate is given for only the three provinces named above. It is probable that the yield will not be less than three million tons, and it may be more. With regard to the competition between native and imported sugar, the director of land records and agriculture states that the prices of the foreign article are still cheaper than the home-made article. Gurdaspur is the only district from which any sign is given of the sugar-refining industry recovering from the depression from which it has suffered in late years. The demand for crushing mills is increasing, but the trading classes are not yet ready to admit that the counter-vailing duties have had any effect upon the sugar-refining industry.

Canada's Canals.

"Expert engineers all agree that the usefulness of the Erie canal as a highway of commerce is practically ended," says the Detroit News-Tribune. "Traffic is falling off so rapidly that soon it will be of insignificant proportions. The state has recently thrown away \$9,000,000 in work which does not afford a penny in return. The proposed expenditure of \$15,000,000 more to complete a 9-foot channel is regarded as a useless waste of money, because no waterway which requires a breaking of bulk and transfer of freight from lake shipping at Buffalo can hope to compete with the railroads. On the other hand it is the universal opinion that through traffic from the lake ports to New York by means of a ship canal will always hold its own against railroad competition. The Erie canal, once the main avenue of travel and commerce between the east and the west, has passed its day of usefulness like the old stage coach. It has become a source of great inconvenience in the cities of Rochester, Syracuse and other large towns. The lake route would enable the state to abandon the unused portions of the big ditch, and wherever it is in the way it could be filled up and the ground occupied for other purposes."

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