

THE LUMBER INTERESTS OF CHICAGO.

On the southwestern border of Chicago is another city whose buildings are the blackened piles of lumber, and whose busiest highways are the passages between, just large enough to afford entrance for a wagon. Through this district flows the sluggish water of the south branch of the Chicago River, its current changing direction with the wind, and its odors unvarying, except to grow a little more intolerable when some huge propeller is fast in the mud, and her own screw, aided by the tugs pulling at her, stirs up the oozy bottom.

Extending into the yards on either hand are long slips from which rise the graceful spars of the lumber schooners, or the stumpy and blackened masts of the barges. Some of these carry nearly a million feet of lumber. The "lumber shovers" who unload them wear a leather apron extending from the belt to the knees, and leather guards to protect the palms of their hands. During the cold raw weather of early spring these men can be seen at work stripped to the waists, regardless of the freezing rain and the brisk lake winds which make such sad havoc with weak lungs.

Almost as far as the eye can distinguish objects through the smoky atmosphere the vast expanse is roofed with the sloping tops of the lumber piles. Here and there rises a planing-mill or saw factory, or more conspicuously the huge grain elevators with their iron roofs and slate-covered sides. Tracks and buildings admit to the heart of the lumber district the locomotive with its string of cars of almost every road in the country, coming to be loaded with the rough lumber, packing boxes, or the finer manufactures of doors, stair rails, and the like. The trains make quite a study of color in the otherwise dingy prospect. Even the cars of the same lines are of different shades from varied exposure to the weather. The air resounds with the hum of the planing-mills, the snorting of the busy switch engines, the jolting of the wagons on the corduroy roads, the rattling of tacks and the whistling of tugs on the river. Scores of chimneys and stacks fill the air with smoke, and the breeze carries with it the finer dust from the saw mills, which finds snug lodgment in the eyes of the visitor, whose effort for relief bedaub his cheeks with the damp soot deposited there.

Scattered about in other localities, generally along the river, are other yards, singly or in groups, aggregating as large an area as that of the "lumber district" described. Even at the mouth of the river, on artificial ground, the mills and lumber piles extend eastward half a mile or more beyond the site of the old lighthouse and Fort Dearborn. The stock of lumber on hand varies from four to seven hundred million feet of sawed stuff and timber, one to three hundred million shingles, forty to seventy million laths, with pickets, cedar posts, etc., in proportion.

The shipments sometimes reach two hundred million feet of lumber and one hundred and fifty million shingles in a single month. The local trade amounts annually to over five hundred million feet.

The town of South Chicago, at the mouth of the Calumet River, twelve miles south, has extensive yards, and, according to the interested parties, bids fair to rival the present city in the future. Many of the citizens of Chicago wish the lumber trade was transferred entirely to the Calumet, for they look with apprehension upon the acres of dry lumber, and fear a repetition of the calamity of 1871. A fire getting good headway in this locality, if fanned by the strong southwest winds prevalent in the summer and fall, could hardly fail to destroy the city as completely as before, despite the efforts of what is called the most efficient fire department in the world.

The region which produces this enormous quantity of lumber extends along the eastern shore of Lake Michigan and half the length of the western side. Reaching far into the interior of the state are streams which bring down the logs rafted together to the saw mills at the river mouths. These lumber towns along the shore are wooden to the last degree. Many are built upon piles driven into the sandy marshes, the buildings all frame, and even the roads made of sawdust, into which the foot sinks as though in

dry sand. Their well water is frequently as yellow as saffron from the decaying wood through which it comes. It seems almost a miracle that any of the inhabitants should escape if one of the forest fires which occasionally sweep through the lumber regions attacked this town. No provision is being made to perpetuate the forests, but they are being cut down right and left, making it only a question of time when the white pine timber will be as scarce as rosewood. As a gentleman connected with the lumber interest remarked, "We are doing nothing for posterity except to decree that they shall not build wooden houses."

The lumber is brought to the Chicago market chiefly by schooners, propellers, and barges, the latter being towed two or three at a time by powerful tugs. The receipts of lumber by rail, except from the south, are comparatively light, although the Chicagoans think it would make a comfortable business for what they facetiously call the "suburban towns," viz., Milwaukee, St. Paul and St. Louis. The immensity of the lumber business of Chicago can not be realized except by taking a drive through the lumber district, and spending an afternoon in the rooms of the Lumberman's Exchange, poring over the statistics compiled by the secretary. There are two hundred and twenty firms engaged either as brokers, manufacturers, or dealers in lumber. Last year one firm alone handled on hundred and twenty-five million feet, averaging in value about \$18 a thousand.

Besides this trade in pine the hardwood lines are in increasing demand. The costly hard woods, domestic and imported, and the cheaper hard pine from Mississippi, form no inconsiderable item in the years' receipts. During the last year the receipts of lumber at Chicago made a grand total of 2,676,757,842 feet, and 1,215,455,494 shingles. Of this, three hundred million feet were of hardwood. The long-leaf yellow pine, heavy almost as mahogany, and so pitchy that a splinter of it will burn like a taper, is rapidly growing in favor for interior work. Good selected stock has a beautifully figured grain, and when darkened a little by time is surpassed in effect by but few of the more costly hard woods. The shipping trade in lumber from Chicago extends northwest, west, and south to the limits of the country, not always stopping there. Some of the lumber towns of Michigan are active competitors for the trade with the Eastern States; but, nevertheless, the city of railroads manages to forward a goodly amount into their markets.

Chicago, being in the centre of a vast system of water and rail transportation lines, is destined to become a larger dealer in lumber every year, although now the largest market for forest products in the world. The millionaire in the metropolis and the section hand on one of the new western railroads both buy the material for their homes from her yards. The boards for the farmers' fences and the ties on the road-bed of the railroad which carried him to his western home pass through the hands of the Chicago lumbermen. The forests of Michigan are still enormous, and the undeveloped West demands their wood. The trade is guaranteed for years to come, and fortunes await those who can skillfully conduct it.—James J. Wait in *Harpers Weekly*.

AUTUMNAL BUMBLES.

The *Timber Trades Journal* of Oct. 6, says: A fortnight ago our Liverpool authority gave the following uncomfortable account of the state of the timber trade in that port:—

"The importation of all kinds of wood goods continues to be far beyond the wants of the trade, and until there is a very marked improvement in the general business of this district, no relief from the present state of depression need be looked for, unless shippers can stop the glut of supplies which are at present being put upon the market."

Since then about eighty ships with wood goods have arrived there, and the same tone was apparent in the report of last week, but a little more hopeful, though on what the hope was grounded was not very apparent. We find the following from the same hand:—

"The importation of North American goods, both timber and deals, continues to be in excess of the requirements of the trade, and therefore,

there is no improvement in prices; at the same time, these are at such a low ebb that there is a probability of shipments being greatly curtailed."

Well, that may be accounted a reasonable source of hope, on a small scale. But as long as there is a ship to load, and the ports are open, we are not likely to have to record the novelty of her coming away in ballast. It is added, however, that

"the last advices from St. John, N. B., report that several of the city mills are shut down, as manufacturers of spruce deals see that it is impossible to make sales at a profitable figure until the English markets show some considerable advance."

This shutting down of the mills is heard of every season, but we have never known it prevent our getting a very plentiful supply in the end. Sometimes it is a drought that stops them, another time great floods have broken up the rafts and scattered their contents over the intervening lands, where they remain high and dry, far away from the navigable channel through which they were bound to their destination. Now, having glutted our market (as they find out), some of the mill owners indignantly shut down their mills, we may presume because only such shabby prices are to be obtained in our chief emporiums. But we have been given to understand that there is always a brisk demand from the States, at the lower ports, which might be expected to keep them going when trade is slack here. At all events, neither in Liverpool nor in London is the reported closing of any number of spruce mills likely to add a dot to the prices obtainable at the public sales in the month of October. Natural causes are now at hand which will stop shipments altogether at most of the ports, both in America and in Europe, and on the termination only of the season—be it early or late—will the trade look for an interruption to the regular routine of importation at this period of the year.

Talking of the approach of winter, it may be permitted to remark that in Europe there are reasons for anticipating that it will be a severe one, and not unlikely to set in early. It is worthy of notice that we appear to have been indebted for the very fine summer we have had chiefly to the southern winds, which have prevailed, with short intervals of change, since the beginning of April. From southeast to south and west has been the rule, northerly and easterly blasts have been of short continuance, and just as they began to be annoying and to effect vegetation the wind has again gone to its old quarters, and however rough it might be, it was almost always genial, and with all the sunshine and rain that was necessary, and latterly—that is, in September—whole weeks of calm, sunny days, though the month began and ended with a storm. In fact, we have had in this country a good old-fashioned English summer, in which each succeeding month brought with it the characteristics which tradition had of old assigned to it.

It used to be calculated that southwest winds prevailed for three-fourths of year in England, but of late this rule has not held good, and not above three years ago the learned and scientific occupied themselves in putting forward theories, to show that the climate of these regions was gradually changing for the worse; and even astronomy was almost turned inside out to account for it. Looking, therefore, to the future of the year, as likely to be consistent with that part of it which has gone before, we may expect that the east and north winds will get their turn with a long innings as the days shorten, already we have a taste of them, and that Boreas will reassert his reign as Christmas approaches, and when he rules at that period he lets us all know it. There is a compensating balance in the seasons as well as in the solar system itself, but its laws are less perfectly known. Rain, wind, and sunshine, heat and cold, are reduced to an average by meteorologists, and, though the years may vary, they find their level in a series and come around again to the happy medium, in which flowers, fruits, and harvest, follow each other in rapid succession "and scatter plenty through a smiling land," after which we may expect that the rigours of winter will be equally conspicuous, and if it should be an early

one, so as to close the Baltic in November, the trade would then have substantial grounds for believing that the import season could not be much further prolonged. That shipments will continue to be made for this country, whether we need them or not, may be pretty plainly seen in the intimation of our Swedish correspondent's last letter. He states, under date of September 22nd, that

"it is not likely any large quantity of goods will be sent from Norrland to London, or similar centres, on consignment this fall."

He then warns us that

"If tonnage can be had at reasonable rates, consignments to a limited extent will be made from Finland, not only to London, but to one or two continental ports."

This is not suggestive of a limited extent, and probably some other British ports may be favored with these contemplated consignments, though the timber merchants of the neighborhood may be by no means coveting such preference. At the beginning of the season the trade of this country was assured that consignments to British markets were not to be thought of, as it was evident they were not in a condition to bear them. Prices have given way on this side since then, say 10 per cent. at least, and now consignments are openly talked of as imminent, to a limited extent, which seems to have no other limitation than that of the tonnage to be got hold of before the final arrest of the proceedings by the advance of General Frosty-fist to the rescue. That is all the security merchants on this side have to protect them from an excessive fall in importation. But there is a part of our correspondent's letter which seems to foreshadow a change for the better, though it be more remote than he thinks. At any rate, he speaks out, and with an emphasis which indicates that he is very much in earnest. He describes to us the state of the forests and the results of the measures taken for regulating the cutting, and then he adds

"In spite of the present depression in the trade, it is my firm belief that we are on the eve of a substantial rise in the value of growing timber, and especially of redwood."

It is not easy to see how, while production is going on at such an enormous rate in Sweden and Finland, any check can be interposed that will raise prices here; but if shippers have to pay more for the growing wood they will hardly continue to ship it on speculation with the probability of a loss on every cargo.

We fear that for this season at least the production will not benefit the trade of this country. There appears to be already so large an accumulation of stock in the hands of the mill-owners that they may be considered almost independent of growing timber for the present, and any attempt to increase its price might throw many lumberers out of employment without affecting the free on-board market, till the stocks now preparing for shipment began to be seriously diminished by the demands of another season.

Teakwood.

I understand, says a writer in the *Garden*, that some of our enterprising hot-house builders are introducing this wood into horticultural buildings, and it is expected it will supersede pine to a considerable extent. It is light, strong, and durable, and not difficult to work. Teak baskets for orchids are now common, and gardeners know how much more lasting they are than those of hazel and other common woods. Lightness and elegance of structure are important considerations in hot-houses in mere ways than one, and in this respect teak has the decided advantage, for it enables the builder to dispense with heavy rafters and beams, and is not much less durable than iron, to which it is preferable in other respects.

An Ancient Forest.

The *Timber Trades Journal* of Oct 6th, says: At a meeting of the Tees Conservancy Commissioners, on Monday last, Mr. Fallows stated that 134 heavy trees, varying from 10 ft. to 40 in length had been dredged from the river. They were, doubtless, part of the forest which existed in the locality in remote times.