

CORRESPONDENCE

Letters are invited from our readers on matters of practical and timely interest to the lumber trades. To secure insertion all communications must be accompanied with name and address of writer, not necessarily for publication. The publisher will not hold himself responsible for opinions of correspondents.

AUSTRALIAN FORESTS AND N.S.W. TIMBER TRADE.

To the Editor of the CANADA LUMBERMAN:

DEAR SIR,—Those who saw the magnificent display of timber made by New South Wales at the World's Exposition at Chicago would imagine that this colony, at least, was well wooded with varied trees of great value. Their conception would be true so far as the variety and value is concerned, but not as to the quantity.

New South Wales is divided into three natural divisions. The first the Pacific slope, lying east of the coastal mountain range, a strip of country averaging, perhaps, forty miles in width. The second is the Table Land, and the third the comparatively dry Western Plains. The first section was fairly well, and, in some places, is now, densely wooded, but the soft, straight-grained woods, the colonial pine, cedar and rosewood, have largely been cut down. The Table Lands have some forests of valuable trees, but they are scattered. The central region has few trees except along the watercourses, and these are of no great value.

No forests largely composed of one variety are found here as in Canada. Sometimes they are dense and tropical in character, the trees being hung with creepers, but more frequently they are open and park-like. Here will be found a pine, there a cedar, interspersed with a variety of eucalypti or gums. The latter embrace a great range of hardwoods, many of them of great toughness and strength, beautifully grained, taking a high polish, and of great durability. Some of them are almost impervious to the attacks of the teredo, the white ant and other marine and land enemies of timber. The fact that their specific gravity is too great to allow of their being floated the distance which they require to be carted to reach a mill or shipping point, and so many of the logs being found to be defective through checks or decay at the heart, makes the timber expensive. Efforts have been put forth by the government and those engaged in the trade to build up an export in these hard timbers, particularly for wood-blocking, but the efforts have not produced, and are not likely to produce, large results. The total export trade of 1895 was less in value than \$150,000, and the major portion of this went to the other Australian colonies. The cut of timber in New South Wales in 1895 was less than six years ago. Queensland is somewhat better supplied with soft building timbers—nearly meets its own demand and yet exports a little. The export is rapidly diminishing, and were it not for the duty levied considerable quantities of building timber would now be imported. West Australia has its famous jarrah and karri, used in paving the streets of London, but is deficient in soft woods. Victoria and South Australia require both hard and soft woods.

What is the available forest area of Australia no one knows, but the government of more than one colony which deemed that it had sufficient timber for its own use and export for years to come, has awakened to the unpleasant fact that this is not so. Some effort is being put forth for the preservation of existing forests and the cultivation of new areas. Australia must, however, depend at an increasing ratio upon other lands for its timber supply.

The value of the importations into New South Wales in 1895 and 1891 were:

	1895.	1891.
Dressed Timber.....	£ 35,986	£ 147,018
Rough ".....	239,541	575,642
Laths and palings.....	6,432	9,643
Doors.....	7,224	25,537

This shows a great diminishment in 1895, owing in part to a lessened demand from the reduction of construction following the crisis of 1892-3, and a lowering in price. A portion of these imports were hardwoods and re-imports from other colonies. Excluding these the chief supplies came from the following countries:

DOORS.	
United States.....	£ 6,335
DRESSED TIMBER	
United Kingdom.....	£ 5,022
Canada.....	765
Norway.....	20,975
United States.....	2,690
New Zealand.....	929

LATHS.	
Canada.....	£ 1,240
United States.....	4,618
ROUGH TIMBER.	
United Kingdom.....	£ 2,611
New Zealand.....	60,111
Canada.....	19,112
Norway.....	2,820
United States.....	67,236

From South Australia there came timber to the value of £78,513. This, however, was almost wholly re-shipments originating in New Zealand, Norway and Sweden, Canada and the United States.

SHOOKS AND STAVES.	
New Zealand.....	£ 2,333
United Kingdom.....	788
Canada.....	47
United States.....	1,979

These importations were under a duty which was removed last year, the trade returns for which have not been published. An examination of these figures will prove interesting and will require some comment.

DOORS.

The doors shipped to this market are mainly from San Francisco, made from California redwood. As soon as the city recovers from the depression, which has not yet passed away, the demand must grow. I had hoped that British Columbia would have shared in the trade, and an attempt was made to introduce cedar doors from Vancouver. The result was unsatisfactory. There is some prejudice here against cedar on the ground that it is too soft. It necessarily follows that they must sell at lower figures than the redwood until a proper appreciation of the wood is secured or else some other means are used to properly bring them before the public. Then, I am bound to say that the samples sent, which I saw, were not equal to those from San Francisco. The mouldings were not as well finished or fitted, and in some, wood of a coarse grain had been selected for the mouldings which apparently had been worked with a dull tool and a little across grain. This, added to the notion regarding the wood, compelled the agent to whom they were consigned to sell at an unremunerative price. Some of those sent were sizes not often used, and this further tended to reduce the net return. I am still of the opinion, after making careful enquiry, that a good share of the trade can be secured by a courageous persistence of properly directed effort.

Some pine doors once came from Canada to Melbourne and even to Sydney, I am told, though I have not found anyone as yet who remembers them. Whether a trade can be made in them is a question. I have not the facts at hand to form anything like an opinion. It will depend upon price. Those who know pine say that a better price could be obtained for the pine than the redwood. Of that there is no doubt, but how much better cannot be told until an experiment decides. The quotations of the Sierra Lumber Company, of San Francisco, a little while ago, were as follows:

Size.	
2' 6" x 6' 6" x 1 1/4", double moulded....	\$2.50
2' 6" x 6' 6" x 1 1/2" ".....	2.75
2' 8" x 6' 8" x 1 1/4" ".....	2.75
2' 8" x 6' 8" x 1 1/2" ".....	3.00
2' 8" x 6' 8" x 1 3/4" ".....	3.50
2' 10" x 6' 10" x 1 1/2" ".....	3.25
2' 10" x 6' 10" x 1 3/4" ".....	4.00

Less a discount of 40%, 5% and 2 1/2% cash.

The sizes most used are 2' 6" and 2' 8" x 1 1/2". An important item in deciding the cost of these doors would be the freight rate. One thing is certain, they could not come by any existing lines. The only chance will be by vessel direct from the St. Lawrence. There is no reason known to me why there should not be such a line of vessels. The other industries of Canada need it, and must have it if they are to succeed here as they ought.

DRESSED TIMBER.

It will be seen that in this class Canada cuts an insignificant figure. The bulk of the trade is from Norway and Sweden or re-exports from the United Kingdom. On my arrival I sought to advance this dressed timber trade. It is certain that it is more advantageous to Canada, whether it always is to the shipper or not, to ship dressed instead of rough timber. The dressed stuff shipped from Norway and Sweden consists of flooring, siding and shelving. It is not clear stuff, but most of it is full of small and tight knots. These knots, of course, wear unevenly in flooring, and do not take paint easily in siding and shelving. There was prejudice against

Douglas fir flooring because its coarse grain splintered. I was told that much of this could be overcome by proper selection and sawing. One British Columbia firm had taken up this trade and its agent here prosecuted the work vigorously and got an entrance into the market for spruce shelving, also for fir flooring, and others were working at it. The Canadian steamers were used to bring the stuff, but just when trade had got on a permanent footing, flour came into demand and the lumber was shut out. Upon seeing steamer after steamer come in without any timber on board, the orders were sent to San Francisco, from where there are frequent sailing vessels. It does now look as if the first results of my efforts in this direction will accrue to the United States. Nevertheless, I think the B. C. millmen will soon find a way to overcome this difficulty. Dressed stuff has already come and more is under way as part cargo of sailing vessels.

There is here a matter on which I should like to get the views of Eastern millmen. They meet the Baltic timber in England, where the freight is against them; could they not dress certain classes of timber and ship to this market, where, if the vessels sailed from the St. Lawrence, they should be on equal terms so far as freight is concerned? The Baltic flooring is 6 x 7/8; the British Columbia is dressed out of 6 x 1, and is therefore 1/2 inch narrower than the Baltic. The latter is quoted at 13s. 6d. per one hundred superficial feet, while Oregon, as it is known from B. C., has sold at 11s., but 11s. 6d. would be paid for it if it could be had.

Laths do not call for special reference.

ROUGH MERCHANTABLE TIMBER.

Under the low prices prevailing some of the owners of limits in British Columbia have concluded that their timber will pay better to permit it to remain in the forest than to cut and ship it. A telegram is to hand that the Pacific Coast combine has been reconstructed. It was rotten from the start last year, and it certainly did not greatly help the Canadian mills, which had the reputation of pretty fairly keeping their agreements. Whether the reconstruction will do better is to be seen. The trades done through importers, known as "Indent Merchants." He takes orders from what in Canada would be known as the owner of a lumber yard, to which a planing and re-sawing mill is attached, and then orders from the mill or its broker. Formerly anything shipped as rough merchantable was accepted without demur and the cargoes were paid for in advance or on receipt of the bill here. Three or four years ago a lot of inferior stuff was shipped by a decaying mill, and at once demands were made for a reduction in price for inferior quality. Since then these reductions have been of frequent occurrence, and have been a serious loss to shippers. In some cases the claim was a just one; in others it was made as a matter of course. The buyer had nothing to lose, while the seller had to pay the cost of the survey or arbitration in addition to any reduction that might be found against him. The importer fell back on the mill that shipped the stuff. The result was that the millman, who was not really represented in the arbitration, was the sufferer.

Shortly after my arrival I suggested a temporary plan for meeting this difficulty, and it was tried soon after on a cargo on which there was a dispute. It did not last, for two good reasons. In the first place, there are two very different opinions held on the opposite sides of the Pacific as to what constitutes "rough merchantable timber." The verbal definition was the same on both sides—timber with a certain proportion of sap and tight knots—but when logs were cheap and lumber dear the stuff sent here was really "selected and clear." Now that the conditions of trade are reversed the millman wishes to ship according to the literal definition, while the Sydney man demands that his timber be of the old type. Until there is an understanding upon this point no method of settling a dispute can be satisfactory. The other trouble is worse still. So long as the seller is very much more anxious to sell than the buyer is to buy, so long will the buyer get concessions in his favor in the drawing up of an agreement that practically puts the case in his hands.

No scheme for a general settlement of a dispute is of any value in the face of a special agreement that was designed to override it.

SHOOKS AND STAVES.

Here again Canada is out of it. Some oak staves do come here from Ontario via New York, and are credited in the return to the United States. There is an opening