

IS TRADE AS BAD IT IS REPUTED?

The *Timber Trades Journal* of April 25th says:—We have been so much accustomed to speak of bad trade during the last year or two, and to find everybody acquiescing in the sentiment and ready to pass it on to the next inquirer, that disbelief in it has come to be almost accounted a heresy, which few are bold enough to lend their names to. In fact, without troubling ourselves with statistics, a sort of general impression has established itself in the public mind that the great trading supremacy of the United Kingdom has gone by. And that the spirit of enterprise that shone so brightly in the days of Drake and Frobenius, and was by them handed down to successive ages of great navigators to the times of Anson and Cook, in the reign of George III., has dwindled and almost evaporated in modern times. Or is so bound up with steam and other contrivances of science for making the tour of the world in crowds, that men themselves have lost their individuality as if they were turned out by machinery, all to one pattern, like ninpins, and that trade itself was becoming engineered like everything else, till it was almost reduced to a mathematical theorem.

But if anybody believes that England is behind the rest of the world, either in its industry, assiduity, or power, let him peruse the Blue Book issued on Tuesday last, containing the annual statement of the navigation and shipping of these realms during the not very flourishing year of 1884, and the contents must appear to him an extraordinary revelation. From this we learn that 347,441 vessels, registering 74,823,763 tons, entered the ports of the United Kingdom last year—not quite so many as we employed the year before, when the numbers were 361,164 vessels, with a tonnage of 75,340,597, the difference being less than 1 per cent. So many did not go out again as the number that came in. The clearances outward in 1884 were only 302,303, and tonnage went no higher than 69,176,612. But even here the ratio was comparatively well kept up, as the numbers the year before were no more than 314,364 outward, with tonnage of 69,452,860.

Here also the difference was very striking. If our trade over sea was declining, it was almost imperceptible in the great volume of business still doing; and it was analyze these figures we find in them a good deal to reassure us, and to satisfy us that if we are, as some persist in predicating, on the road to run—and going by steam too—it will take us a long time at this pace to reach that unfortunate goal. Of the 347,441 vessels that entered our ports 186,783 were sailing vessels and 160,658 steamers. But what must be considered of more importance is the great preponderance of those under our own flag. 321,179 were British vessels, and only 26,266 were foreign. Things are great and small only by comparison. To be told that 26,266 foreign ships brought cargoes into the United Kingdom last year, as an expression taken by itself, might have the effect of creating a belief that foreigners were monopolizing our ocean-carrying trade; but when, on the other hand, we are told that for every foreigner a dozen British ships were employed in our carrying trade, the idea vanishes, and the competition is held to be of almost no account. It is to steam that we are indebted for this access of British tonnage. The shipping interest does not admit of being under any obligation to the Board of Trade for it, and doubtless, had Mr. Chamberlain's Shipping Bill been passed last year, these figures would have been materially modified. This point, however, was escaped, and our shipping still dominates the ocean traffic of the world, as it is without question the best in the world, and all arguments to the contrary notwithstanding.

Of the 302,303 ships clearing outwards from British ports 101,000 were sailing vessels and 191,311 steamships. Steam is already numerically, and as to employment, treading closely on the heels of sailing ships. 229,241 of these ships were British and 73,062 foreigners. The difference in favor of British against foreign ships last year was only 11 to 1. An unusually large number of British vessels, chiefly steamers, were "on strike" against the low freights ruling, but they are not unlikely to find employment this year, as far as can be judged from present

appearances, and let us hope they will be able to pay their way handsomely.

The number of vessels trading between foreign countries and British possessions—meaning entered British ports—was 60,603, with a tonnage of 31,688,621, cleared outwards 61,936, of tonnage 32,584,001.

In the coasting trade 286,836, with a tonnage of 43,135,242, entered inwards, and 247,867 cleared outwards, with tonnage 36,592,611, an amount of traffic around our coasts, which appear almost incredible when we hear immediately about us, and have done for the last twelve months, little else than lamentations over the dulness of trade. The total number of British registered vessels engaged in the home and foreign trade was stated as 18,754, with a tonnage of 7,083,944, employing 199,634 men and boys. The number of British vessels registered was 24,149, tonnage 7,363,707. During last year 1,001 new vessels were built in the United Kingdom, with a total tonnage of 497,442, not including those launched in fulfillment of foreign orders and to be sailed under foreign flags.

From these statistics we gather that, large as our trade appears to be it is scarcely adequate to our capabilities. The one unfavorable deduction from its otherwise imposing array is to be found in the last figures, from which we learn that out of our 24,149 merchant ships only 18,744 found employment last year, and therefore that 5,398 vessels remained without employment, with a tonnage of about 300,000, which signifies so much trade out of gear and the forced idleness of 10,000 or 12,000 men and ships' officers.

Thus, while we are still doing an immense trade, our whole people are not well employed, and though not 1 per cent. fell off last year in the number of our vessels in active occupation a great many among us are unable to participate in the general welfare because their special calling is not immediately in requisition. In 1874 the total mercantile tonnage of the United Kingdom, steam and sailing, amounted to 20,872 vessels of a total tonnage of 5,864,588, exclusive of those hailing from British possessions. The number has continued to decrease since then, out the call for a larger class of ship, and especially steamers, has prevailed ever since, and while the home list now contains only about 19,000 ships, their tonnage is ten times greater than that of the greater number in 1874.

During the nine years, 1875 to 1883 inclusive a Parliamentary paper, issued last week, informs us 10,318 British ships, including those of our colonies, were lost, their united tonnage being 2,816,072. The average, therefore, would be about 1,149 ships per annum, and in tons 312,097. The tonnage of the vessels lost during the nine years would only average 273.

The gap to be filled up in the natural course will, therefore, every year, taking one with another, be about 313,000 tons of shipping to be built, without taking into account the natural expansion of trade, which, indeed, just now is a phrase of which the markets take small account. Incidentally we may mention that with all these losses, the death rate at sea did not exceed one in 48, while on shore the death rate is reckoned to average one in 50 per annum for males.

That shipping has been a little overdone—that is more vessels built than were absolutely wanted—is now pretty generally allowed, and much of our trade depression is probably attributable to that cause, but our losses at sea are so great that the building yards still are able to employ a large staff of men, and the latest information from the great building districts of Glasgow and the Tyne is that the trade is again improving. The Government having given out its orders for the Admiralty, a start has been imparted to the trade, and the private business coming in at the top of it seems to have caused many of the superfluous shipwrights to be put on again at fair wages, and things are no longer in the bad state they were a while ago.

The timber trade is also looking up, and we learn from the other side the Atlantic that there is the uprising of a good demand visible in all directions, both in Canada and over the border. Everybody seems sanguine of more

trade to be done this summer, and the lumberers are said to be pursuing their occupation without reference to the state of the outside market. Their business is to get forward as much timber as they can from the forests of the interior, and they mean to do it, not doubting but they will be recompensed for their labor by a return of better trade.

The Government shipping report which we have briefly analyzed, is hardly in accordance with the large decline in the trade of the country which was indicated by the Board of Trade returns to which we referred in our last number. We have been as busy at sea within 1 per cent. as we were last year, yet our export trade, which goes hand in hand with shipping, the deficiency is about 5 per cent., and in our import trade much more.

From this it seems to be proved that the difference arises chiefly from the smaller valuation of our exports. There is as much trade doing, or nearly so, but at such a depreciation that the value cannot be put down at such good figures as before. Whether the 11,000,000 extra which the Government have just notified Parliament that they want will go to promote trade or not remains to be seen. But we may pretty well rely that the rumoured 3d. additional to the income tax will by and by come upon us. Nor will the trading community begrudge it if a commensurate revival of business takes place before it is absolutely demanded, and they see the money usefully applied in securing the safety and the vast trade of the empire.

OLEFT WOOD.

In many of the old mansions the beauty of the split wood wainscoting has been much admired. The art of rending wood is not lost, but it is curious that there is no machine that can divide a piece of wood into any number of parts by following the grain from one end of the stock to the other in all the curves and crooks that are found in rending. For straight grained stock the saw answers every purpose with a great saving in lumber, time and labor, but there are places and requirements where the stock is to be rived out, that every part of the work may be of equal strength and of like tenacity throughout. This rending process, or the trade of the rail splitter, is one that requires the extremest skill on the part of the render. The lath splitter will seize a log of wood, however straight or crooked, and divide it in halves through its central line, guiding the crack and keeping the rend in the centre of the stock by the manner of applying the splitting force of the wedge. The instant the split leaves the central line, or one half of the log, or the other is weakened, the deflection is the greatest in the weakest place, and the result would be that if the render were to continue the splitting would cleave to one side, and the halves be unequally divided; but the render is on the lookout for this, and can tell in an instant when the split leaves its central division, however winding the log may be, and assists the weakening side by slightly bending the other till the divided work has been thickened and the rend continues on the centre. The halves are divided in like manner until the stock is divided into eights by radial divisions, when the circular wedge shape section is ready to be divided cross ways following the annular grains or fibre-ring that forms about the heart of the wood, and again the radial division applied, till the log has been rived into the fineness required. The curve or bending flexure of the divisions by which the line of cleavage is directed is a principal that is brought about by the skill in handling the wedge, or whatever tool is used in splitting. If the knife is forced around to bring the spreading force with a larger leverage on one side than on the other, the strength of the shorter half will be better prepared to resist the action of bending than the other, and the work will have a tendency to cleave to the thickened side if the rend has not departed too far from its central course, if so, the work will need assistance in the way of springing the stock into the position that will allow the split to rectify itself. It is skill and practice in the correct principles of rending wood that brings the division of stock with the grain into equal parts to a success, and not chance cracks or good luck in splitting, or the placing the divid-

ing wedge or frow into the exact centre of cleavage. Why this splitting should be affected, or the course of the rend be changed in the slightest degree from the effect of bending, the stock behind the work where the action is to be expected is a principle that must make use of the extension and distortion of the material it meets with in being deflected. If a beam is loaded at each end while it is supported in the middle, the upper layers will be extended while the lower fibres will be compressed; the tendency between every dividing line will be for one surface to slip upon the other, as may be observed in a built up beam of thin boards before gluing, a tendency to "crawl" will be noticed from the support in the centre to places where the load is applied. This tendency to creep is sufficient to break the cohesion between the grains of wood. A piece of stock split for a few inches deep in two or more places sufficient to divide the stock in three or more equal parts, will, on being deflected, bring the shearing strain on every fibre in the stock; and since they have been weakened in the line of cleavage that has been made, and the rend must continue at those places long before the remaining stock has been injured in the division of the grains, so by breaking the stock over a support, so as to cause the material to assume a sharp bend first to one side and then to the other, the line of division is conducted and forced through the stock and left in equal parts with the grain.—*Timber.*

THE BRITISH TRADE.

Recent advices from Great Britain indicate a somewhat unsettled state of the timber market, with an upward tendency or at least a stiffening of prices. The uncertainty, however, has the effect of making both buyers and sellers cautious.

The *Timber Trades Journal* of April 18th says.—"Buyers here do not care to purchase now at any serious advance made on the supposition that war will result, and afterwards find themselves in a position of great disadvantage with others who had bought earlier in the year." Again, after mentioning a circular from a London firm notifying a withdrawal of all quotations, it says.—"We know for some time past one or two of the dealers have put up their prices, but this the first printed announcement of the kind we have come across."

The reports of our contemporary from the ports, which are the chief points of interest to the Canadian trade, are to the same effect. Its Liverpool correspondent, after mentioning the busier aspect of the wharves, and the greater freedom in executing orders, says of Norway flooring:—"Prices of the latter goods have advanced during the week, and with the imminence of war a further increase is more than probable; in fact some shippers are for the moment indifferent sellers, unless at a substantial increase, or have withdrawn from the market for the present. In other goods there is no change in quotations."

The same account comes from the Clyde. The Glasgow correspondent remarks.—"The timber market here has slightly improved during the past week, as indicated at the auction sales that have taken place, and this was to be expected in the present position of the trade in the face of small stocks on hand the probability of a war which would, at any rate, affect prices of deals."

Since those reports the prospects of war seem to be less imminent, though not altogether removed. Therefore there is still the same element of uncertainty. Some assume that a peaceful solution would necessarily be followed by some decline in prices, but this is by no means certain. There is not only to be taken into consideration the fact of "small stocks on hand," but also the still more important fact that the visible supplies of timber are exceptionally low at present. Neither would the higher war prices in Great Britain necessarily mean all gain to the Canadian manufacturer, for there would be increased freights and war risks to be taken into account.

The situation is one of uncertainty, but appearances are not unfavorable to those who hold stock.

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