

PROPOSED U. S. TARIFF ON LUMBER.

The following communication, written by Mr. Wm. Little, of Montreal, and published in the *Canadian Journal of Commerce*, will be read with interest by lumbermen on both sides of the line.

Respecting the proposed changes in the United States tariff as regards lumber, you have no doubt observed that the majority of the House Committee of Ways and Means of the U. S. Congress have, in their Bill "To Reduce the Revenue, and Equalize the Duties on Imports and for other Purposes" reported a tariff to practically exclude for a time Canadian pine and spruce lumber, by imposing the rate of \$3 per M. on spruce and \$3.50 per M. on pine lumber; for although these are not the terms used, yet these will be the rates of duty established if their recommendation be adopted; but knowing that no duties imposed on imports are so universally reprobated by the American people as those on lumber, now that their forests of white pine and spruce, this side of the Rocky Mountain, have been recklessly destroyed—no less than four bills having been introduced in the last session for putting all forest products on the free list—it seemed strange that this committee should recommend increasing these duties to nearly double the existing rates. The mystery is, however, solved by the announcement made by the American lumber journals that this change in the tariff was made at the instance of Messrs. Congressmen Bliss of Saginaw, and Wheeler of West Bay City, who had succeeded in getting a provision inserted, "that sawed lumber imported from any country which imposes an export duty on logs shall pay a duty equivalent to such excess in addition to the duty provided by the proposed bill."

This was certainly patriotic in Congressmen lumbermen Bliss and Wheeler, and the American people will, no doubt, be grateful to them for trying to double up the duties on lumber, in order that they and their friends in the Saginaw district who have run out of timber (which hitherto, fearing the duty might be removed, they claimed was inexhaustible) may obtain Canadian sawlogs at a nominal rate, to keep their otherwise worthless saw mills in operation, and add still further to their enormous wealth. A very pretty little scheme as it is, and one that might be successful, but for the fact that the people of the United States have yet to be consulted, and the Canadian people may also have something to say in the matter.

That the gentlemen of this Committee have been trifled with is evident, as the lumber papers state, "the Congressmen of the Committee find it hard work to understand why this demand is made as they know little about the lumber business in a practical way," which remark is obviously correct, as they appear ignorant even of the effect of their own recommendation, for, after having proposed to nearly double the existing rates of duty, they talk of a reduction, and say: "We are satisfied any reduction of the light duties on lumber proposed would tend to discourage the proper care of our timber lands, now so generally preserved by the judicious cutting of the trees of full growth at such intervals of time as will preserve the timber reserve, etc."

The reasons here given, if not intended to be ironical, are so incongruous, when applied to the treatment of his timber land by the American lumberman as to border on the sublime. Who except the gentlemen of this Committee, ever knew of an American lumberman giving proper or any care whatever to his timber—of his not cutting every tree, from which he could realize a cent, down to six inches in diameter, and leaving the forest when he is through with it, looking like the abomination of desolation. Even to mention the word forest to the majority of American lumbermen is like flaunting a scarlet rag in the face of a mad bull, and American lumber journals never print the word but with fear and trembling, lest they might seriously offend some of their constituents.

Who ever heard of one of them contributing a dollar to the cause of the forests, out of the millions they have amassed from their destruction? Their contributions don't go in that direction, but are rather employed in deriding any attempt to create an interest in forestry, a subject of such paramount importance to the welfare of both the United States and Canada that it is trifling to mention it in connection with such a petty subject as timber duties. Unfortunately for the cause it is this insignificant duty, of no moment by itself, that estranges those who should, and no doubt otherwise would, be among its most ardent advocates. Their forestry work is not now done in the woods, but in Washington.

With the fiscal policy of the United States we, of course, have nothing to do, and if the American people choose to impose upon themselves a tariff of \$1.50 or \$3.50 or any other rate on imports of Canadian lumber, it is a matter which concerns themselves, and we will rest content, but to fancy that the Canadian government will change its policy because Messrs. Bliss and Wheeler's friends are short of sawlogs is too ridiculous for anything; and the rate will probably be raised to \$3 as originally intended, unless the U. S. lumbermen permit some material reduction to be made from existing tariff rates on lumber.

For 20 years up to 1866, the export duty on pine saw logs remained at \$1 per M. while the duty exacted on Canadian pine lumber entering the United States was \$2 per M., a policy which completely destroyed the Canadian sawmill industry on the Lake Erie shore, and which was on this account transferred to Buffalo and Tonawanda, while during the same period thousands of American citizens were employed in New Brunswick sawing American sawlogs taken from the State of Maine, then to be shipped home free of duty when sawn, all to the prejudice of the Canadian lumberman; and our government neither remonstrated nor made any change in the rate of duty; but at this time rumblings began to be heard from the west; we were to be invaded in the rear, and finally the American lumber journals announced that a rail was to be made on the Georgian Bay district of Canada, and that Gen. Alger, Col. Jeffers, Col. Bliss, in fact a small army of superior officers, were then organizing with that intent. Our government thus forewarned, and having also learned from the same reliable sources of the havoc and desolation which followed wherever these warriors appeared—of the mighty monarchs they had overthrown, of the hundreds of millions they had slaughtered, and of the vast territories they had laid waste, thought it prudent to put a couple of extra rails on its fence, which was then only one rail high, just high enough that they might know there was a fence there; but when these gentlemen heard of this, and said "that they didn't mean harm in any way, that they didn't intend any devastation to our country, but just wanted a few saw logs; that though they had plenty of logs at home, they were a little off color, and they just wanted a few of our good logs for 'sweetening,'"—and promising to be good fellows for the future, our government took one rail down, so that they don't find any difficulty in getting over it; but they are still not happy because we don't take down the fence altogether; and because some of them invested a few dollars in Canadian timber limits, worth ten times any sum paid for them, and our government won't legislate especially for their interest and that we don't all go into extacies to have these gentlemen, who have devastated their own forests, rush in and destroy ours in like manner, we hear a constant whine about the ungenerous conduct of the Canadians, and the existing conditions misrepresented and distorted. There are, however, American lumbermen of character, such as the Hon. S. O. Fisher, of West Bay City, who, holding to some old fashioned notions of honesty, and probably annoyed at hearing so much of this delusive cant, had the fairness to say: "As soon as we undertake anything of that sort (referring to towing over logs to Michigan) up will go the export duty to \$3 or \$4 a thousand feet. They (the Canadians) would not let us rob them any more than we would not let them rob us. These candid words, however, caused his banishment from the capital, as to be "as sound on the sawlog question" is rank treason in the eyes of Michigan lumbermen, and his place in the council of the nation is now filled by the Lord High Admiral, who, with our friend the mighty warrior Colonel Bliss, appear to have doffed their watpait to pursue the peaceful avocation of log-rolling in Washington, and are now, as our western friends say, "Working this log racket for all it is worth."

"But more true joy the exiled Fisher feels

Than Wheeler with a senate at his heels."

The Canadian government has always expressed its willingness to reduce or entirely remove the sawlog duty, whenever the United States lumbermen permit Congress to reduce or remove the duties from Canadian lumber, even though at the present moment—when the log and lumber duties are alike—all Saginaw lumbermen (Messrs. Bliss and Wheeler included) know that they now have an advantage of more than \$2 per M. over the Canadian manufacturer, owing to the cheaper rate at which logs can be towed as compared with freighting the product in vessels—the better condition in which the stock is delivered in market, free from splits, checks, and weather stains—and the additional value, delivered without cost, of the rough products for pickets, lath, shingles and fuel for their salt blocks, which the Canadian operator, owing to his isolated position and the cost of freight, finds in many instances a nuisance.

Without taking into consideration the very great advantage of being in a large market, where buyers go to purchase stock, and which can be supplied at any time by rail or water, instead of having to send forward their lumber at the convenience of vessel owners, and accept such prices as they can get from buyers who at the time of arrival may neither want the lumber nor have any convenient place to receive it—the writer knows from personal experience that the advantages possessed by those towing logs from Canadian points on Lake Erie to Buffalo and Tonawanda, over those manufacturing in Canada, were more than \$4 per M. and had the effect of bankrupting every Canadian manufacturer rash enough to try to compete under such exceptional conditions, a fact which enabled the Hon. Mr. Weston, four years ago, to make the painfully true remark, "On the North shore of Lake Erie the Canadian saw mills are in rums, but the mills at Tonawanda are employing thousands of American workmen manu-

facturing Canadian logs towed from the Erie north shore. The Saginaw mills are running out of stock and looking to Georgian Bay for Canadian logs to cross the Huron Lake to keep their mills and men at work."

And now that this matter has been so obtrusively forced on our attention—unless some satisfactory adjustment is arrived at, the Canadian lumberman will insist that the export duty on saw logs shall at least be fixed at such a rate higher than the import duty imposed by Americans on Canadian lumber, as to place the Canadian manufacturer on an equal footing with Americans sawing Canadian sawlogs. "Only this and nothing more." Moreover, the sentiment is rapidly growing that, considering the condition of our own forests, it would be prudent to prohibit the export of pine sawlogs altogether, a course which will assuredly be adopted should the exceptional duties proposed be enacted by the United States government.

It is probable, however, that when this matter is discussed in the House, Messrs. Congressmen Bliss and Wheeler may discover that there are other Congressmen, who are not lumbermen, who like the gentlemen of the Committee, may "find it hard work to understand why this demand is made," and though they may "know little about the lumber business in a practical way," they may know enough about it to enquire on what grounds the existing duty on lumber, which should have been abolished years ago, should now, for the sole benefit of a few Michigan lumbermen, who have speculated in Canadian timber limits, be raised to nearly double the present rates, while ninety-nine out of every hundred Americans outside of Congress consider, in the interests of the country, these duties ought at once to be removed; not reduced but absolutely, completely removed, as whatever duties are imposed on pine and spruce lumber must hereafter be paid by the consumers—the merchantable white pine and spruce timber of the United States, east of the Rocky Mountains, being about gone.

Taking as an illustration the pine of the State of Michigan, we find that the 29,000,000,000 feet, reported by the census of 1880 as standing in the lower peninsula, have dwindled to less than one-tenth that amount. The editor of the *Chicago Timberman*, after investigation, could only discover 3,000,000,000 there last year, a portion of which was cut the past winter, so that of good merchantable white pine there is not to-day a supply in the whole of the State that would satisfy the sawing capacity of the Michigan saw mills for more than six months. There is still some little to be had of gleanings from third or fourth cut burnt-over stump lands, the product from which goes entirely into the different grades of culls,—this, together with some red pine (Norway) and inferior hemlock, may keep the mills running for a short time, but, as is said above, the good, merchantable white pine timber is about gone, and the mill owners, not one in ten of whom owns a stick of good white pine standing, find that the few individuals who hold what patches of good timber are left, will not dispose of it to them at such a rate as to leave them a profit in converting it into lumber, and being forced to get stock somewhere, are becoming desperate; and while some are going south and west others appear to be retiring gracefully from the field as expeditiously as the insurance companies can conveniently pay for cremated saw mills, while others again, like our friends Bliss and Wheeler, seem inclined to raid Canada for supplies, and although we are always happy to have our American friends amongst us, and are willing that they shall enjoy every privilege possessed by ourselves, outside of voting away our property, we must draw the line there.

Assuming, as we have a right to do, that the census estimates of 1880 of standing pine timber in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and the upper peninsula of Michigan, are as accurate as the present condition of the forests in lower Michigan has proved them to be, we have from the total of 55,170,000,000 feet then standing, to deduct 37,451,342,338 feet, being the amount cut during the past 10 years, according to the admirable comparative statement annually prepared by the *Northwestern Lumberman*, which leaves only 17,708,657,662 feet remaining, and adding say 2,000,000,000 for lower Michigan, we have a total of 19,718,657,662 feet remaining on hand, as compared with 84,170,000,000, as returned by the census 10 years ago, and since the cut last year amounted to 8,305,833,277 feet, there would appear to be just a little over two years supply in the whole North West.

It is not, of course, contended that this is the exact condition, for no doubt timber has been cut in the past few years that was not included in the estimates when they were made, but to offset this there must be taken into account the amount of timber made into shingles, during the time, the same authority giving a return of 41,303,373,085 shingles, requiring probably equal to 8,000,000,000 feet of timber. So that it becomes evident that the great white pine forests of the United States have vanished.

The spruce forests of the east, which are confined chiefly to the States of New York, and Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont, have now but "a few scattered remnants" of their once great wealth of timber,