

The Commercial

WINNIPEG, JUNE 9, 1900.

LUMBERMEN'S TROUBLES.

The meeting of Northwestern lumbermen, which gathered together at Minneapolis on May 29th, was probably one of the best representative trade conventions, which have met during the present year, and the voice of such a gathering cannot be accepted as other than representing the actual state of the lumber trade in the North-western States. Taking that for granted, one has only to take a look over the proceedings of the meeting as reported in the *Mississippi Valley Lumberman*, of the following day, to discover in what an unsatisfactory and unhealthy state the lumber trade of the northwest really is.

In a meeting of discontented manufacturers it is only natural to expect some tall grumbling, and in this respect the late meeting of lumbermen was no exception to the rule. But the convention had not come near to a conclusion of its business, before it became evident, that there was good reason for the grumbling. The purport of most of the speeches was, that the bulk of the business now being done by the trade, was being done at a loss instead of a profit, and when in such a meeting men were heard to say, that they had the alternative of sell and realize, or burst, it may be judged how honest and genuine were the expressions of opinion made. Of course many of the speeches advocated measures of temporary relief, in the hope, that matters would soon improve themselves, and thus take away the necessity for any action tending to permanent improvement; and one step of that kind taken by the meeting was the passing of the following resolution:—

That a committee of five be appointed to secure the signatures to an agreement of manufacturers of lumber in the northwest to withdraw their travelling men for sixty days; that when seventy-five per cent. of all the manufacturers shall have signed such an agreement the manufacturers shall be notified and the agreement shall become operative.

Another motion passed was in favor of a ten per cent. rise in the price of all grades of lumber, which seemed to be only one of those emotional acts of the meeting, for it was evident that there existed in the trade no system of organization whereby the carrying out of the motion could be enforced. No regular scale of prices acknowledged by the trade could be said to be in existence, and even were such in force the latitude in the grading of lumber at different points was so wide, that such a list would be of little or no value. Eventually the meeting adopted an amended report of a committee, which called for inquiry into and assimilating of grading, and the arrangement of a price list in keeping with this new and uniform system of grades. In short the meeting saw no way out of the troubles of the trade, except by forming what politicians of the Senator Butterworth stripe would call a trust, and would seek to make illegal, and its formation criminal to all engaged therein.

This convention of lumbermen of the North-

western States is not without its lessons to parties in other lines of business, and specially to people who look upon every combination in trade as a menace to the public welfare. There is certainly no extraordinary state of trade generally in existence in the Northwestern States, which would produce the demoralized condition of the lumber trade as revealed at the convention. Business generally is in a healthy state, and the crop outlook is the best there for many years. Even in the lumber trade there is no cry of dulness, and quite a number of manufacturers stated that their sales this spring, were in excess of those of last spring, and yet the whole of this important branch of trade was moving at a loss to all engaged therein. The fact was revealed, that without organization, so that prices could be fixed at a profitable scale, the whole lumber trade of the country would drift to smash and ruin.

It is amusing to listen to the arguments of a class of people, who are in plain language the nihilists of trade. They would advise, that the lumber trade of the Northwest at the present time be allowed to drift to smash, and out of the smash and ruin would come a purer and better state of affairs. The cure thus advised might be good, as it certainly would be effectual. It would be as much so as the one prescribed for the old woman's toothache, namely, to take a mouthful of cold water, and hold it in while you sit on a hot cook-stove until in boils.

The Northwestern lumbermen have taken the proper course to secure a healthier state of their branch of trade than now exists, and it is to be hoped they will follow the course they advocate, before it is too late. In this province there was a demoralized state of the lumber trade during the four years preceding 1887, and the trade would gladly have made any sacrifice in order to bring about a better feeling. But unlimited stocks were held by banks, who kept the market demoralized by the eagerness to sell, and thus prevented any sensible understanding being reached. Now the trade have a price list to which all adhere, and a state of prosperity is the result, and to this the lumbermen to the south of us must go if they are inclined to keep their trade in a safe state.

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES.

Only a small proportion of the general public know of the machinery the Dominion Government has at work, to protect unsuspecting citizens from being fleeced by unscrupulous traders in the matter of short weights and measures, and a still smaller proportion are aware of the loss sustained by the consuming public through lack of knowledge in this respect. In a new country like the Northwest people are very prone to fall into the error of doing business so to speak on the dead jump, and paying far too little attention to how the details are carried out. In no field is this carelessness more marked, than in the neglect to purchase staple commodities. If every-day consumption only by standard weight or measure, where it is possible to so regulate purchases

If this country is a new one, its facilities for securing the stamping of standard weights and

measures are by no means short. The Winnipeg district of inspection extends from Port Arthur to the Rocky Mountains, and from the International boundary line on the south as far as settlement reaches to the north. Mr. R. T. Hugzard, the inspector, is located at Winnipeg, and he has assistants at Brandon, Qu'Appelle Station, Port Arthur, Calgary and Prince Albert. The office of the Inspector, with its multifarious tools and appliances for testing and stamping, ranging from the tiny stamp for gold weights to the gasometer for testing gas meters, show that the Government has made full provision for the wants of traders who require weights and measures tested and stamped, so that there is no excuse for the man who has to pay a penalty for neglect or breach of the law. Then the law itself is on this point sufficiently clear and concise, that the most ordinary mortals can clearly comprehend it. The sections of the act read thus:

Every person who sells by any denomination of weight or measure other than one of the Dominion weights or measures, or some multiple or part thereof, and every public weigher or measurer who uses any weight or measure, or who uses, in any certificate as to the weight or measure of any article weighed or measured by him, any other than one of the Dominion weights or measures, or some multiple or part thereof, shall be liable to a penalty not exceeding twenty dollars for every such sale, weighing or certificate.

Nothing in this Act shall prevent the sale, or subject a person to a penalty under this Act for the sale of an article in any vessel, such vessel being included in the sale, when such vessel is not represented as containing any amount of Dominion measures, nor subject a person to a penalty under this Act for the possession of a vessel when it is shown that such vessel is not used or intended for use as a measure.

The careless reader may think that this is meant only to overtake dishonest people, but they are liable to find out that it will reach careless ones also. The light weight and short measure, are not aimed at alone, but the unauthorized weight and measure come equally within the scope of the law, and it is well so, for they are made to cover deception far oftener than the actually falsified. Recently the Winnipeg Inspector instituted a number of prosecutions of traders for selling merchantable commodities by the pail full, and it is to be hoped that this practice will be stamped out. It must be remembered however, that the law cannot interfere when goods are put up in pails or other unstamped packages, and sold as part of the parcel. The Department of Inland Revenue at Ottawa under the control of which the Act is enforced, does not hamper manufacturers or traders with [foolish restrictions as to size, weight or capacity of the packages they turn out, so long as such packages are not alleged to contain any definite weight or quantity. The trouble comes in where the pail is used simply as a measure, and this has been done extensively of late by peddlers and others in the sale of fruit and other commodities and in most cases done with the intention of mystifying and deceiving the purchaser. The honest farmer too had better look out, or the Inspector may be on his track about his system of selling potatoes and other produce by the sack. During this spring hundreds of sacks of potatoes have been palmed off in Winnipeg