

# The Markets for the Manufactures of Wood

Report of Special Trade Commissioner, Mr. H. R. Mac-Millan, as Published in the Weekly Bulletin of the Department of Trade and Commerce, Ottawa.

A very important trade to which Canadian Trade Commissioners in Great Britain have repeatedly drawn attention but which has not, up to the present, received very serious attention from Canadian firms, is the supplying to Great Britain of wood manufactures, woodware and wood turnery. Large quantities of manufactured wooden articles are imported into Great Britain yearly. The total value of such imports in 1913 was \$14,098,426 and in 1914 \$8,861,400. Almost one-half of the imports are supplied from the United States; the other countries from which supplies are drawn were in 1914 in the order of their importance—Russia, Germany, France, Sweden, the Netherlands and Canada. The imports credited to Canada in 1914 were valued at \$193,777. In the same year the United States, which possesses no natural advantage over Canada for the production of many important classes of wood goods, exported to Great Britain manufactured wooden articles valued at \$4,413,811.

There is, however, a still more unsatisfactory feature of the Canadian trade. Canada is the only important country supplying Great Britain's needs from which the exports have shown a serious decrease in the four normal years, 1910 to 1913, inclusive. Although in this period the gross imports into Great Britain increased from \$8,288,203 to \$14,098,426 and the share of the trade obtained by the United States in the same period grew from \$3,379,958 to \$6,684,326, the Canadian trade through this period of expansion actually dropped from \$538,829 to \$252,739. Thus while the exports from the United States have increased by 98 per cent., the exports from Canada to the same market have decreased by 53 per cent.

The importance of Great Britain as a market for these goods is not confined to the population of the British Isles alone. Large quantities of manufactured wooden articles are yearly assembled in Great Britain and re-exported to other parts of the world. The value of such re-exports was in 1913, \$3,678,451 and in 1914 \$3,284,525. The re-exports thus amount roughly to a third of the total imports. A small proportion only of the goods so re-exported are further manufactured in Great Britain. By far the greater part are re-exported in the condition in which they are received. The chief countries to which re-exports of manufactured wooden articles are sent from Great Britain, are British India, \$710,606; Nigeria, \$257,342; Australia, \$256,190; Argentina, \$199,454, and Ceylon, \$194,861.

The destination of the articles re-exported shows the opportunity, where regular steamer sailings now exist, of building up direct exportations from Canada. Important articles shipped to Australia are skewers, dowels, clothes pegs, and broom handles. The birch, beech and maple of Eastern Canada, the alder of Western Canada are suitable woods for the manufacture of these articles. The manufacture itself is no more difficult to organize on a competitive basis than the manufacturing of shingles, an industry which has been brought to its highest development in Canada. There does not appear, therefore, to be any economic reason why a direct trade should not be built up from Eastern Canadian ports to the Argentine and Australia and from Western Canadian ports to Australia, in the more common and important classes of manufactured wooden goods.

A great variety of articles is included under the classification of manufactured wooden articles, woodware and wood turnery. The most important classes are kitchen and household utensils, toys, dowels, skewers, chair parts, broom handles, clothes pegs, brush-backs, birch squares for spools, handles, and turned wooden boxes.

These articles, with the exception of tool and implement handles, are made almost exclusively from birch, pop-

lar, beech, maple, basswood or spruce. The handles are made chiefly from hickory and ash.

Canada will not be able to compete to any great extent in hickory and ash handles, because of the exhaustion of hickory and ash from Canadian forests. Over 90 per cent. of the hickory now used in the manufacture of Canadian handles is imported, as also over 50 per cent. of the ash.

The United States supply of hickory and ash suitable for handles is becoming exhausted. The consequent increase in the price of hickory and ash is leading to a continual increase in the use of maple. Maple handles are now exported to Great Britain from the United States. There should be many firms in Eastern Canada favorably located to compete with American manufacturers in the production of maple handles.

The conditions under which certain smaller wooden articles, such as toys, turned wooden boxes, kitchenware, are made in Europe, preclude any possibility of Canadian competition. Such articles are made from cheap, inferior birch and poplar in large factories, equipped with excellent machinery. The machinery is operated by women who are paid about 40 cents per day, or by men who are paid 75 cents per day.

Samples of turned wood goods, the products of such factories, together with prices, have been sent to the Commissioner of Commerce, Ottawa, and may be consulted by any one interested.

Only the small articles which can be manufactured from extremely defective wood can be sold cheaply. The larger articles, which require wood over 2 inches in diameter, or wood that is fairly free from knots, command a higher price and afford the Canadian manufacturer an opportunity.

The following articles are at the present time imported in large quantities from the United States, and to a small extent from Canada:—

Birch square,—1¼-inch, 1½-inch, 1⅞-inch, 2 inches square and 2½ feet, 3 feet, 3½ feet, 4 feet long.

These squares are used in the manufacture of spools and bobbins and for chair legs and the cabinet trade. The supplies from Sweden and Finland are restricted to the smaller sizes, because of the prevalence of knots in the birch of those countries. Pin knots are admissible but no large knots are accepted. Quebec birch is preferred because it is cleaner and harder. The price of the Scandinavian squares in normal times is £9 per standard of 165 cubic feet, and about £12 may be secured for Quebec birch squares.

Dowels are used in exceedingly large quantities in the furniture, flag and window shade trades. The supply comes chiefly from the United States. Birch and maple are preferred. The requisite in dowels is that they should be smooth, clean, free from knots and straight, qualities in which the United States product excels.

The sizes vary from 3-16 inch to 1 inch in diameter and 12 to 108 inches in length. The best selling sizes are 3-8 inch diameter, 36 inches and 48 inches long, which sell c.i.f. English port for 13 shillings and 18 shillings per thousand respectively. They should be tied in bundles of 200. Throughout the first six months of 1915, large shipments were made from the United States. The price has risen to 17s 11d for 36-inch and 23s 11d for 48-inch since the outbreak of war.

Very large quantities of broom handles and mop handles are exported to Great Britain from Finland, Sweden, and the United States.

Swedish whitewood and redwood squares, 1⅞-inch x 1⅞-inch x 51 inches, free from knots, are imported at £11 per standard c.i.f. These squares are turned and dyed in Great Britain. The price since the outbreak of war has risen to £14 7s 6d. Douglas fir has been used for this purpose and found very satisfactory.