

Upon the re-assembling of the Toronto association, the before mentioned resolution, having been signed so as to fulfil its requirements, was received, with a full report from the officers of each district. The Hamilton delegates being present, reported that Hamilton and Brantford associations would aid by every means in their power any legal and proper action the Toronto association might adopt to keep up standard prices, and spoke in the highest terms of the unanimity which induced every member but one of the Hamilton association to be present at the joint meeting.

Following up the purpose of the original resolution another one was adopted having in view immediate communication with the Canadian drug trade in such a way that a general expression of the feeling of the trade may be secured, as well as its present help to assist in terminating what is as yet a local grievance, but what, if permitted to spread, would soon envelop every Canadian druggist in the slaughtering trade system from which his American confrere suffers. The Toronto druggists feel that the fight may be a protracted one, but are hopeful that if they can keep united and secure the assistance of the druggists of Ontario, they can stop an evil which would not only mean ruin to many, but which would of necessity destroy the associations throughout the Province and the work which they have so laboriously accomplished.

Sponges.

What is said to be the first consignment of American sponges in quantity which has ever gone to the European market was shipped recently by the Ponar, of the North Atlantic Trident Line, whose ships start from Philadelphia. It consists of 6,000 pounds of Florida grass sponges and 1,000 pounds of Florida yellow sponges.

The various houses engaged in the European sponge trade include in the term American sponges the Cuban and Bahama product, as well as that of Florida. The American fisheries proper, however, are situated on the Gulf coast of the latter State, and runs north and south from near Apalachicola on the north to the neighborhood of Tampa town on the south. The Gulf bottom to the west of Florida runs in ridges and valleys, and upon one of these ridges trending north and south and situated nearly forty miles from the coast the American sponges grow.

The catching and marketing of sponge on the Florida coast was started in 1853, and the method of operation adopted at that time, and which still holds universal popularity, is purely co-operative—that is the vessels, equipment, and provision represent the capital invested, and the crew furnish nothing but their labor. The fishing is done from small boats belonging to the vessel, each boat being occupied by two men. The work requires considerable

skill, and none but the hardest men can stand the labor and exposure. The sponges, after being cleaned and assorted, are brought principally to Key West, where they are sold at public auction.

It would be an interesting sight if our readers could see the American sponge fisherman at work on the bank. The vessels are anchored close to the spot which the captain of each has selected for trying (the grounds are 150 miles long), and the yawls are lowered, filled with the needful outfit and manned. Each one contains an instrument which has all the appearance of an ordinary wooden bucket, except that the bottom is made of ordinary window glass. Then, besides, there are the pair of hooks, hinged like pincers, and fitted with handles over forty feet long.

Arrived over the spot where they think sponges are growing, one of the men, stooping over the side of the boat, pushes the bucket about six inches down into the water, bottom downward, and lowering his head, peers through it. The water is clear enough to make the objects on the bottom of the Gulf stand out quite clearly. The man finally makes out a promising looking sponge far down below him, and while he still looks through the water-glass, as the bucket is called, he employs his hand to drag to the spot the long tongs which already rest on the bottom. They are carefully placed round the animal, the hooks are compressed together, and a good wrench separates the sponge from the piece of rock it was attached to. Or perhaps one man holds the water glass in place while the other manipulates the tongs. When first transferred from its native home to the bottom of the yawl, the sponge does not at all resemble the article which is so familiar and so useful for toilet purposes. The whole fabric is surrounded by an inorganic membrane with larger and smaller holes piercing it. Through the larger holes the sea water is sucked in the course of the convulsive compression and expansion of the animal's body. The water thus drawn in is forced through various canals, the glutinous lining of some of which detain long particles of animal life, and is then at last discharged through the smaller apertures. The first step of the fisherman is to tear off this outer membrane. Stripped of this the sponges are spread out upon the decks of the vessels where the meat or animal proper very rapidly disintegrates and runs out of the elastic stocking, which latter is used in our baths. This decomposed meat is of a gelatinous consistency, has a reddish appearance, somewhat like human blood, and is said to smell frightfully.

The next step is to crawl or cure the sponges. This is almost exclusively done in the first or rough stages in the crawls which line the coast near Tarpon Springs. Crawls are made by twisting seaweed into ropes, and after driving stakes into the sand in a curved shape a little distance out from shore, running lengths of the ropes several times round these stakes from shore and back again. A number

of these crawls are constructed in spots where the surf is pretty heavy, and into them the sponges are thrown, all sticky and smelling as they come in from the fishing grounds. The ropes of seaweed prevent their being carried out by the waves. The continued pounding of the surf and the advance and retreat of the tide clean the sponges quite thoroughly of the animal portion that may have been left behind. In some cases this process of the sea is aided by men who squeeze the pieces and strike them with sticks.

The method of selling by auction at Key West is rather a peculiar one. The sponges are put up for sale in a lot of so many. Then each bidder writes down the figure he is willing to give, after examining them, on a small piece of paper, either adding his name or not, as he chooses. The auctioneer receives all these slips, and, after asking whether all the bids are in, he reads to himself the different slips, tearing each up in succession as he finds another with a higher figure upon it. No opportunity is given for competitive bidding one against the other, nor is a second bid allowed, unless two sums named are the same and higher than any of the others. In that case the whole operation is commenced over again.

Until recent years it has been customary in the Florida fisheries to "load" the sponges, as it is called, with either lime or sand, or a mixture of several substances which last was very difficult to detect. At that time it was the universal rule to sell the product by weight and the value of a catch could thus be greatly increased. Several sponge houses have quite lately introduced the method of selling by count as well as by weight, and since the general adoption of this means, the "loading" has been much more rare. Even after being cleaned and bleached in the rough in Florida the sponge bears no resemblance in color to the article which we employ in our baths. A further and more complete bleaching is necessary, effected by means of chemicals, and this is done generally in London.

The rough bleach completed, the Florida sponges are compressed by machinery, so that they can be shipped to Philadelphia and New York. The final bleach and cleaning take a long time to accomplish. The marine impurities and fragments of rock and shell are extracted by means of chemical baths and careful trimming. The unsightly ferruginous color which permeates nearly all kinds of sponges disappears in the process of bleaching. It will be noticed that some sponges are of a light lemon tint, and others are much darker. This difference is caused by the former being treated by a new chemical process, which purifies them more thoroughly. The darker colored kinds are erroneously called "unbleached," in order to distinguish them from the lighter varieties. The strength of a sponge does not depend upon its color so much as upon the natural cohesion of its fibre or skeleton.—*Painter and Decorator.*