

JULY.

The monthly evening meeting of the Royal Society of Tasmania was held at the Museum on Tuesday evening. Mr. James Barnard occupied the chair. Apologies for absence were received from the President (Viscount Gormanston) and the Hon. Sir J. W. Agnew.

TASMANIAN TIMBERS — THEIR COMMERCIAL USES AND PREPARATION
FOR MARKET.

Mr. A. OSBORN GREEN read a practical paper on this subject. He stated that last year Tasmania's timber exports were valued at £18,000, the imports at £9,000, and the excess of exports over imports for the past five years was £66,000. Norway, a poor and sparsely inhabited country, with no trees that would cut 12in. planks, exported every year timber valued at several millions sterling. Tasmania was covered with trees, some of which would singly furnish sufficient timber to build a ship; trees furnishing timber for every industrial purpose, comparing favourably with any for keeping in truth, durability, hardness or softness, heaviness or lightness, beauty of marking, and fragrance. Notwithstanding this Tasmanian timber exports were nominal, the woods not being merely unknown in the world's markets, but the majority were only known as curiosities in the city of Hobart itself. A buyer would have difficulty in placing an order for them. Out of the 10 eucalypti of the island 6 were not obtainable in plank. But it was gratifying that our timber imports were yearly falling off, and it should be the endeavour of every one with the interests of Tasmania at heart to bring her valuable timbers into more general use locally, and by the diffusion of more exact knowledge to bring about such an export trade as would for ever assure the colony a large and certain revenue. He submitted a complete list of Tasmanian timber trees. These would supply timber for every industrial purpose for which timber was used. It was said that "common hardwood" was not to be depended upon. The faults were not of the timber, but attributable to distinct kinds of trees, cut in and out of season, being promiscuously bundled together under the name of "gum" or "hardwood" timber, to the want of classification, and to the use of unseasoned timber where only seasoned should have been used; or, where unseasoned timber was admissible, using it without proper provision for the shrinkage which must occur. Suppliers and users must recognise the necessity for treating timbers like men—timbers must be classified and put to the work for which they were best suited. It was a hopeful sign that a large cargo of named eucalyptus had been sent to London, profitably sold, and a second cargo was being prepared. Sawmill owners and timber merchants had prayed for an independent inspection before the timber was shipped, and were diligently seeking how to assure a continuation of orders and further expansion of business. The necessity for inspection was shown by the fact that some lots were not allowed to be shipped, and chiefly owing to the appointment of an independent inspector the shipment had been described as undoubtedly the best that had ever been sent from Hobart. This was satisfactory, but it was only once. The inspector was only appointed temporarily, and his duties then only extended to keeping out bad timber. The timber was only to be used for the commonest purpose, for paving roadways, and coming into competition with the cheapest timber placed upon the London market—yellow deal in short lengths. Not that yellow deal was by any means to be despised, for it was of a durable nature, and the people supplying it graded and classified it as a matter of course. Therefore, if our exporters hoped to keep the footing already obtained they must not dream of relaxing a jot of the conditions by means of which that foot-

hold was obtained. One mixed or inferior shipment would have a most damaging effect ; might, indeed, put Tasmania out of the market for a generation, for no man had such a long memory as a deceived business man. The intrinsic merits of Tasmanian timber would shortly win for it a position in the home markets if they were not clouded and hidden by the ignorance and carelessness, or worse, of millers and exporters. Let millers either ring or fell at the right season, classify their logs, honestly grade their planks, and beyond this not only submit to but court and demand the most rigid independent inspection and marking—then not only would the Derwent from New Norfolk to the sea be thickly dotted with vessels bringing timber to regular lines of ships crowding the wharves of Hobart, but the sound of the axe and the hum of the saw would be heard throughout the island. A vast opening existed for our timbers in England, France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, and the Cape. He described in detail the method of preparing for market Baltic deals, the wood at present in competition with Tasmanian hardwood for paving blocks. The trees were felled when the sap was down, and they were sorted for size ; butt lengths of large trees were set apart for first quality, small butts for second, and tops for third and fourth qualities. On being sawn, the planks were again examined and sorted before leaving the mill. At the port of shipment the timber was closely examined for size, cutting, and quality, the deals going forth to the world as first, second, third, or fourth quality, according to the classification adopted at the particular port of shipment. In Norway and Sweden numerous marks were used to denote each quality, so that the London builder finding “Jansen’s” cutting suitable, naturally inquired for his trade mark when next in the market. Builders did not use deals promiscuously, but chose one mark for framing doors, another for studding, house and warehouse floors, each having marks considered most suitable. At other Baltic ports, sworn officers marked timber and other produce as first, second, and inferior. Unmerchantable qualities were not allowed to be exported to bring the port into discredit in distant lands. These marks were so well and faithfully applied that merchants would buy on the mark alone, and the value of the marked timber was as well established as the price of gold. By the lettering of the mark the purchaser could pick out stacks coming from particular districts near certain ports of shipment, having found by experience that the timber wanted was there produced. Satisfying himself by inspection that the standard of excellence he had so long known was still maintained, he went with confidence either to make an offer for the shipment or to bid for lots at the next auction. Not a deal, plank, or batten was sent to market without being plainly branded on the end with marks denoting where it came from, and its quality. The European exporter knew that only by the strictest honesty of classification could he gain the confidence of the market and full prices. In these days of keen competition the difference of a small percentage in the selling price meant the difference between an assured competence and ruin. At present England was looking for new sources of timber supply. Australasia was anxiously seeking an outlet for her superabundant resources. To retain her advantage, he suggested that Tasmania should see :—“(1) That all timber be rung or felled when the sap is down. (2) One colour should be chosen for branding Tasmanian timber. (3) That every millowner register a set of marks, a separate mark for each quality of each timber that he saws, and mark each piece that leaves his mill, it being more important to mark bad qualities ‘bad’ than good ones ‘good.’ (4) That all registered marks be properly protected. (5) To collect and make public the fullest information concerning the marks and qualities of our timbers generally, giving equal prominence to the merits and defects of both the species of

timber, and of the same timber from different localities, pointing out details by which the quality may be judged, in fact placing the whole of the local knowledge freely at the service of inquirers. (6) At the outset to allow nothing to be sent to Europe but first quality timber, and to prevent second quality being sent until there was an inquiry for it. (7) That an independent authority shall verify all marks before timber is allowed to be exported, and place an official mark upon each piece- (8) If the timber were picked and marked for certain uses, *e.g.*, paving, framing, floors, implements, tool handles, etc., it would be an advantage." The classification mentioned was necessary for any timber, and for eucalyptus perhaps more than any other in the world. With such a system of classification, with millers ready to supply any quantity at short notice, and exporters able to supply seasoned or fresh timber, a great deal necessary to ensure success would have been achieved. But to complete the scheme it would be necessary to have an energetic, well-educated business man, well up in the qualities and uses of timbers, with samples portable and in bulk, in the rough and in finished articles, whose business it should be to drive home to users the advantages of our timbers. Tasmania must be satisfied with no half measures if she wished to compete with her neighbours, to introduce a new material into the markets of England and to change the trade customs of one of the most conservative of countries.

A number of specimens of timber were shown by Mr. Green to illustrate the superiority of Tasmanian woods, and the reading of his paper evoked loud applause, subsequent speakers, including Hon. C. H. Grant, M.L.C., Messrs. T. Stephens, M.A., F.G.S., A. Montgomery, and Morton, endorsing generally its contents.

OTHER PAPERS.

Mr. JAMES R. McCLYMONT, M.A., contributed an interesting paper on "Ancient wrecks and relics of European vessels on Australian coasts." The writer dealt with wrecks belonging to the seventeenth century, and treated his subject chronologically and topographically.

Mr. L. RODWAY described "A New Centrolepis," of the order Centrolepidiæ, seldom honoured with attention by any but the inveterate collector or the botanical student.

The customary votes of thanks were passed, on the motion of the CHAIRMAN, who mentioned the probability of the Council considering the timber question one of sufficient importance for a renewal of the discussion at the next meeting.