

Increase in Cost of Building

The Boston Commercial Bulletin undertakes to answer the very common complaint concerning the high price of building materials. Pointing out that it is frequently said that the cost of building is twice as high as five years ago, the Bulletin makes comparison between the price of various kinds of lumber, steel bricks, etc., in 1901 and the present time. For instance the Bulletin says that ordinary spruce frame lumber was quoted at \$17 in May, 1901, \$20 a year ago and \$25 now; match spruce boards \$18 to \$20 in 1901, \$19 to \$21 a year ago, and \$24 to \$25 now; extra cedar shingles \$2.80 minimum in 1901, \$3.30 in 1905 and \$3.60 now; white pine uppers \$62 minimum in 1901, \$83 in 1905 and \$88 now.

We are told that a slight increase of the prices was notable for the four years to 1905, the increase has been greatly extended during the past year. For instance it is pointed out that the common bricks, while standing at from \$7.75 to \$8.00 for the years to 1905, have now jumped up to \$9.75 and \$10.50. Portland cement rose from \$1.54 per barrel in 1901 to \$1.65 in 1905 and to \$1.90 this year. Steel frame increased in price little at all in 1905 as compared with 1901, but within a year have advanced about 5 per cent.

Making then a percentage comparison between 1901 and the present time the Bulletin gives the following:

	Increase. Per cent.
Spruce, ordinary frames.....	47
Spruce, 10 and 12-inch diameter.....	42
Spruce, matched boards.....	29
Shingles, cedar, extras.....	29
Clapboard, spruce, 4 feet, extras.....	33
Laths, 1½-inch.....	39
Oak, quartered, 1 inch.....	28
Oak, plain white, 1 inch.....	27
Whitewood, 1 inch.....	37
Maple, 1 inch.....	22
Ash, brown, 1 inch.....	31
White pine, Michigan uppers, 1 inch.....	39
Cypress, 1 inch.....	35
Bricks.....	29
Lime.....	15
Cement.....	25
Steel beams and channels, 3@15 inch.....	5
Steel beams and channels larger than 15.....	5
Angles, 3 inch and larger.....	5
Average advance on materials.....	27½

It is further found that wages of labor in the building trades have increased about 14 per cent, but on the assumption that labor in the production of building materials increased to an equal extent, it would appear that the increase in costs of buildings is about equally divided, directly and remotely, as between material and labor.

And here we have the summing up as given by the Bulletin:

Five Years	Increase. Per cent.
Building materials.....	27½
Building labor.....	13½
Architects' fees.....	2
Contractors' charges.....	2
Total.....	45½

Commenting upon the Bulletin's showing, the

Springfield, Mass., Republican says: "From actual quotations and conservative estimates it hence appears that it really does cost about 45 per cent more to build today than five years ago.

"This is taken to refute conclusively the notion that costs of building have doubled within five years or increased by 100 per cent. And, of course, it does, assuming the correctness of the quotations which is evidently not to be questioned. But as a matter of fact the Bulletin unwittingly or carelessly concedes far more than it should. The adding together of the several percentages of increase for various groups of charges is, of course, wholly wrong, and this may quickly be exposed by indicating that if the groups of costs were further divided a total percentage increase of 100 or over could be obtained. It is as if the percentages of the first table given above had been added together to find the total or net average increase of cost, and that would have given a 500 per cent increase or thereabouts. Assuming that the cost of building is equally divided between labor and material, the figures given would show an average increase in cost of only about 20 per cent instead of 45.

"But an increase of one-fifth or 20 per cent is large and must be keenly felt. When plumbing fixtures and the like are taken into consideration, the actual increase in cost of building may be found to be fully as large as represented. But why should 1901 be taken as a base of reckoning? Prices had undergone a heavy advance at that time. Combinations, trade agreements and trusts, promoted by and finding shelter behind the high Dingley tariff rates enacted in 1897, and thus taking the utmost advantage of the improving industrial conditions, had begun to lift prices two or three years before 1901, and to find out just what has been the increase in cost of building which now impresses people and causes painful exclamation, we should have to go back to 1897 and 1898. Let the Bulletin do this and then it will comprehend the full ground of present complaint.

"We have not all the quotations at hand for years back of 1901, but a few may be gathered from the federal bureau of labor's recent Bulletin, giving the course of prices back to 1890. Thus Michigan white pine uppers now quoted at \$88 per M feet, were quoted in 1897 and 1898 at about \$46—an increase since then of over 90 per cent. Spruce boards, now quoted at \$24, were then quoted at \$14—an increase for the eight years of over 70 per cent. Common brick, now quoted at \$10, were then quoted at about \$5.50—an increase of nearly 100 per cent. Cement shows no increase, but there is a very substantial increase in lime, in structural iron and steel and other forms of iron, and in glass and other material not included in the above review.

"Let, then, the inquiry go back eight years instead of five. The Bulletin sentimentously says that 'prosperity is a tax.' Very good; it is certainly such under a trust-breeding high tariff. Therefore extend the inquiry back to the beginnings of the high tariff prosperity and get the full meaning of the tax. It will be found, we imagine, that while the costs of building may have increased only about 20 per cent in five years, most of which has been added in one year, the increase is nearer 40 to 50 per cent in the eight years."

Barnes and the Muck Brush

It will be remembered that President Roosevelt recently sent to the senate the nomination of Mr. Barnes, his present executive secretary, to be postmaster at Washington City. Barnes is the person who officiated in the recent episode at the White House in which Mrs. Minor Morris figured. It has been charged by reputable eye witnesses that Mrs. Morris was treated outrageously and forcibly ejected from the White House. Among the witnesses to Mrs. Morris's ejection was a representative of the Washington Star. Be it remembered that the Washington Star is a paper without any particular politics. It has generally lined up with the national administration, whatever party may have been in power. But the Star has revolted and recently printed an editorial from which the following extracts are taken:

"The president has roundly trounced the magazine muck-rakers who have said unpleasant things about the great trust magnates. Now it

would seem to be in order, in the interest of fair play and the square deal, for somebody to show up the iniquities of the wielders of the muck-brush.

"Take for instance, the case of Mrs. Minor Morris, now coming to the front again in connection with pending action upon the nomination of B. F. Barnes to be city postmaster. Mrs. Morris was a respectable, cultured, ladylike woman, whose husband, through the congressional pull of her sweet brother, Representative Hull of Iowa, had been turned out of a petty office and the family deprived of a livelihood. He was removed without the slightest charge of incapacity or ill conduct, and solely at the demand of the high-minded Hull. Headed off in all her efforts to get redress in other quarters by her dear brother, she naturally went to the White House to appeal for justice to that grand champion of the square deal, Theodore Roosevelt.

"An engaging trait of Theodore Roosevelt's

character is his readiness to stand by his friends when under fire. He not only gave prompt approval to the action of Barnes and the rest in the affair, but in his usual imperious and impetuous way he undertook to make everybody else approve it.

"He attempted to coerce the newspapers into accepting the cooked up White House version in lieu of the careful, unbiased statements of their own reliable and trusted reporters. In the same strenuous fashion he went on to employ the whole powers of government in behalf of his White House favorites and to crush out all opposition. The police department and all the detective machinery of the government were set to work to scour the city and country for evidence, damaging to Mrs. Morris and calculated to vindicate Barnes and the police.

"The meager results from the widespread cast of the great executive dragnet must have been a sad disappointment at the White House. The biggest item in the catch was the remarkable testimony of Dr. H. Bascom Weaver of Asheville, N. C. This testimony, it is stated by an Asheville paper, was secured from Dr. Weaver by Republican State Chairman T. S. Rollins, 'who was desirous of aiding the administration,' and 'at the request of the chief of police of Washington.'

"Dr. H. Bascom Weaver is a willing little cuss, ready to violate his professional honor for 'the vindication of our chief executive,' and so he proceeds to tell an elaborate story of having treated Mrs. Minor Morris about two years ago in Asheville for about six weeks, and that he came to the conclusion that she was unbalanced mentally. The White House evidently put a high value upon the testimony of Dr. Weaver, for it is paraded as the most important feature of the testimony against Mrs. Morris furnished by the administration to the postal committee and figures prominently in that committee's 'confidential' report in favor of the confirmation of Barnes to be postmaster. But its usefulness is greatly damaged by the irrefutable proof that Mrs. Morris was never in Asheville, never met Dr. H. Bascom Weaver anywhere, never wrote to Dr. H. Bascom Weaver and was never aware of the existence of Dr. H. Bascom Weaver until he bobbed up as a witness against her on behalf of the president. And now, worst of all, Dr. Weaver, cornered in his fabrication, confesses that he never treated Mrs. Minor Morris, though he names her specifically in his testimony, but he claims that he treated another Mrs. Morris.

"Then Major Sylvester reports regretfully that nothing defamatory of Mrs. Morris could be obtained from the department stores.

"It is to be regretted that the testimony of the White House officials and employes is not presented in a more intelligible shape. It is evident that the witnesses were not properly coached. Of course the whole gang was badly rattled by the exigencies of the case. No two of the witnesses agree.

"Moral—The victims of a White House knock-down and drag-out should never be indignant and on no account drop on their knees and offer up a prayer for divine guidance and support, under penalty of being declared insane; and if they should follow up this incriminating act by 'praying twice' on their knees, they must be adjudged dangerous lunatics to be consigned at once to a padded cell.

"But what does the republican senate care for evidence? Barnes, through whose blundering stupidity and incapacity this great national scandal has fallen upon the White House, will be rewarded by an office with a salary considerably larger than is given to United States senators and representatives, more than Secretary Loeb gets, or the secretary of the senate; more than the justices of the supreme court of the district get.

"Down with the accursed muck-rake. Up with the blessed muck-brush!

"That is the latest edict from the White House."

TIME TO BEGIN

The New York American says: "It is not apparent, if the president has the smallest regard for consistency, how he can continue to refrain from action. 'The Standard Oil company,' he proclaims, 'has, largely by unfair and unlawful methods, crushed out home competition.' Apply the law, then, Mr. Roosevelt, and crush this law-defying trust. 'Words,' as you truly said long ago, 'are good when backed by deeds, and only so.'"