TIMBER.

Τηε term “ timber” is applied to wood of sufficient size to be adapted for building purposes, whether it be standing in the forest or after it is felled. While the timber forms a portion of the growing tree, it is distinguished as “stand­ing timber when felled, it is called “ rough timber.” Af­ter the rough log is converted, that is, sawn into the forms for which it appears best adapted, the various conversions, as the produce is called, are designated according either to their shape or their dimensions, as sided timber, balk, thick­stuff, plank, or board. These several terms will be advert­ed to in a more advanced portion of this article, where they will either be defined or incidentally explained.

Timber is of such incalculable value as the material for the construction of our fleets, and it ministers also so largely and in such numerous forms to our every-day wants, that it is not surprising the best means for its suc­cessful cultivation should have occupied much of the atten­tion of enlightened horticulturists ; while it is certainly a subject of much wonder, and has been occasionally one causing no little anxiety, that the maintenance of an ade­quate supply should be almost wholly left to accident, and that it consequently should be greatly neglected.

The species of timber which are chiefly used for build­ing are oak and fir. Our supply of fir is for the greater part drawn from abroad, as the climate of Great Britain does not appear to be favourable to the growth of the best varieties of this species of timber ; but with oak the case is different. There is no doubt that England was originally, almost from one extremity to the other, covered with forests, in which the oak predominated ; and per­haps the best oak in the world is indigenous to England. We learn from the Doomsday-Book, that even in the reign of William the Conqueror, timber was so plentiful that the woods were not valued according to the quantity standing in them, nor according to the quantity which might be annually felled. In fact, the woods, as timber, were com­paratively valueless, and their worth was estimated by the number of swine which could be supported by the acorns. At present the produce of oak from our forests is not in any adequate proportion to the demand for it ; and we are obliged to resort to foreign markets for this useful tim­ber, or for substitutes. This is to be regretted, because undoubtedly it is very desirable that we should be indepen­dent of other nations for our supplies of so important a com­ponent of our naval supremacy; and it is the more desir­able, because in general the substitutes which we are able to procure are not equal in quality to the produce of our own soil. The oak of Great Britain is, for ship-building especially, superior to most timber which we can thus ob­tain. The reason that the maintenance of the supply of oak timber does not meet with the attention which is re­quired by the demand for it, evidently is, that although the demand is present and urgent, the advantages to be derived by any attempt to provide a supply are too prospective to tempt the cupidity of individual speculators. The home sup­ply is therefore almost wholly left to be provided by those who have a hereditary interest in the produce of the soil, the great landholders. There are, it is true, large tracts of land which, as royal forests, are available for the services of the state ; but it is only within a recent period that sufficient attention has been paid to planting them, while the enormous demand for oak timber during the late long naval war had completely exhausted the stock which was previously grow­ing upon them. It may not be deemed irrelevant to state the extent of this forest-land ; at the same time premising, that there is much of it which is but ill adapted for the growth of good timber. the following account of these forests is taken from the Seventh Report of the Commis­sioners of Lands Revenue. It states the extent of the land in which the timber belongs to the crown in each of the forests to be :—

Acres. R. P.

In New Forest 66,942 3 26

Dean 23,015 3 29

Aliceholt and Woolmer 8,694 1 31

Whittlewood 4,850 3 32

Salsey 1,847 0 23

Whichwood 3,709 3 5

Waltham 3,273 3 2

>Shcrwood 1,466 3 10

Bere 926 2 13

Sulehay Walk in Rockingham Forest 860 3 23

115,594 0 34

“ Of which total quantity about 70,000 acres are fit for the growth of oak timber.” The Report also gives a state­ment, which we shall quote, as forming a criterion, founded on authority, to judge of the produce of forest-land : “ If 700 acres, or 1/100, of this land were enclosed and planted every year, until the whole 70,000 acres shall be completed, they will, if kept under proper management, furnish a per­petual supply of at least 35,000 loads of oak timber annu­ally, from the time that the first planted trees arrive at 100 years growth.” Table V. will give a good idea of the enor­mous consumption of timber which is entailed upon us by the extent of our navy. It may also be observed, that since the alterations in the system of registry at Lloyd’s, mer­chant-ships consume nearly as much timber in their con­struction as ships of war of similar burthens.

The effect of the gradual destruction of the forests is a question of a speculative nature ; a question too specula­tive, and involving consequences too far distant from our own time, to admit of discussion in this article : still it may be thus casually adverted to, because it is not a stretch of the imagination to suppose the time must arrive when the forests which furnish the present supplies will be exhausted by the unceasing and increasing demand upon them, and by the rapid spread of population. But a very few years have passed since it was comparatively easy to procure fir trees from the north of Europe, of sufficient size to make top­masts for the largest classes of men of war. Now there are no trees from thence to be purchased which will make such topmasts. Until about thirty-five or forty years ago Riga inch-masts were to be obtained as large as twenty-five inches in diameter. At that time, from the increased difficulty in procuring them, Canada yellow-pine sticks were substituted, which could then be got with ease as large as thirty inches in diameter ; but now it very rarely happens that a stick of larger diameter than from twenty-five to twenty-seven inches is imported, and even this timber of these sizes is gradually becoming more scarce. Until lately timber of sufficient scantling to make stern-posts for the largest ships was to be procured ; now such logs are not in the market.

The first English writer on timber was the celebrated Evelyn, who published his “ Sylva, or Discourse of Forest Trees,” in 1664. This book still continues one of the standard works on the subject in our language. In 1774 a new edition of it, with most extensive notes, and also en­gravings of the trees mentioned in the text, was published by the celebrated Dr Alexander Hunter of York. The last edition with these notes was published in 1825. In