AMERICAN TIMBER FOR SHIPBUILDING.

We copy the following from our able cotemporary the Boston *Traveler*. It comes very opportunely as a forcible reply to a leading article in the London *Mechanics' Magazine* (Dec. 16, 1859), in which the case of the *Minnesota* is taken up to decry the character of American timber-built ships, as being inferior to the same class of English vessels in durability. It will be seen that the *Mechanics' Magazine* quoted the article referred to from our columns, and advocated the superior durability of English timber-built ships, with a great amount of solid statistics, which do not appear to be capable of easy refutation; still, as the attack is principally against Mr. Donald Mackay's writings, relating to American and English-built ships, he is capable of answering for himself, and will no doubt effectually do so. The *Traveler* says:—

A few months since we published an article upon the defective and rotten condition of a portion of the planking and ceiling of the steam-frigate *Minnesota*, now undergoing repairs in Charleston navy yard, because we believed our Navy Department had been imposed upon by the parties who furnished the timber, which had decayed so rapidly. The article was extensively republished in English papers, and was referred to as an argument against the use of American timber for shipbuilding. Now such an inference, from our remarks, is not logical, neither can it be sustained by the facts of experience. We cited the *Minnesota*, as an exceptional case, and expressed our surprise that she should have been planked with such timber, when so much timber of undoubted quality could be easily obtained. The contract to furnish her planking, was probably a political job, which the navy yard officers knew how to manage without running the risk of being removed. On the other hand, the planking and ceiling of the frigate *Merrimac*, built in this vicinity, was properly seasoned before used, and a sounder ship cannot be found anywhere. The same may be said of nearly all our ships-of-war. Take for example the old line-of-battle ship *Ohio*, now at Charleston; we believe there has not been a plank put into her for 20 years, if not 30. The *Vermont* is equally sound. In a word, with one or two exceptional cases, the causes of which are known, our navy is probably the most durable in the world, because the timber of which the ships have been built, is the best. Our live oak is harder than East India teak and as durable, and of this, our navy is framed; our white oak along the seaboard is so inherently sound that it may be used without seasoning, and our hard pine knows no decay, but tear and wear. Our navy yard authorities, who have made the qualities of wood the special subject of experiment, assure us, that our white oak for the purpose of shipbuilding, is not only stronger, but more durable, than either English or African oak, and that our live oak is unrivaled the world over.

In support of these assertions we may refer the English to the condition of the frigate *Essex*, which they captured in 1814. She was built in 1798, and continued fit for service, without any sign of decay, to 1837, when she was sold, not because she was unsound, but because a new class of vessels superseded that to which she belonged.

We believe that English and African oak and East India teak are good woods for shipbuilding, and that the condition of the ships of the English navy is generally sound, yet there are cases of rot which might be cited, as exceptional, not to prove that their timber was naturally and inherently bad—as the English have asserted to be the case, because the *Mimesota's* planking was partly defective and decayed—but to show that the timber had not been properly seasoned, or had been subjected to influences out of the ordinary course. The frigate *Vernon*, is a case in point. Built with the utmost care, under the immediate inspection of Sir Wm. Symonds, at the end of four years, she was found very rotten. We believe she has since been condemned. The *Foudroyant*, line-of-battle ship, in four years had to be nearly re-built, in consequence of dry rot. The *Eden*, of 26 guns, in two years was so decayed that it was necessary to remove all her wales, the sheer-strake, and a considerably portion of her topsides. Large quantities of fungus covered her timbers. The *Isis*, built in 1840, seven years afterwards had 78 timbers taken out rotten; all the ceiling in the hold; mast-steps. and timber strakes, were also decayed. Several other cases, even of a recent date, might be cited to show that the British navy is not rot-proof; but we will turn from the navy to the merchant-service.

The West India mail steamers, *Clyde*, *Tweed*, *Tay*, and *Teviot*, all first-class vessels, built without regard to cost, within the past six years, in consequence of dry rot, have had to be repaired at an expense of $300,000. There is little doubt that dry rot is more general among British than among American shipping, and that the latter last longer because built of more durable materials. The British generally fasten and season their ships more carefully than we do, and provide them with better pumps, and heavier ground tackle, and to these, not to the superiority of timber, may be attributed their age. We refer to the mercantile marine alone; our navy, we contend, though small, is the model navy of the world in the durability of its ships, and to keep it so, is the object of exposing any of its defects, that may come to light, with a view of having them guarded against in future. The SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN which copied the facts in relation to the *Minnesota* from the *Traveler*, will probably be as much surprised as we were, to see that they have been used as an argument against the durability of American ship-timber.

WISDOM FOR WINTER.—Never go to bed with cold or damp feet.

In going into a colder air, keep the mouth resolutely closed, that by compelling the air to pass circuitously through the nose and head, it may become warmed before it reaches the lungs, and thus prevent those shocks and sudden chills which frequently end in pleurisy, pneumonia, and other serious forms of disease.

Never stand still a moment out of doors, especially at street corners after having walked even a short distance.

Never ride near the open window of a vehicle for a single half minute, especially if it has been preceeded by a walk; valuable lives have thus been lost, or good health permanently destroyed.

Never wear india-rubbers in cold, dry weather.

Those who are easily chilled on going out of doors, should have some cotton batting attached to the vest or outer garment, so as to protect the space between the shoulder-blades behind, the lungs being attached to the body at that point; a little there is worth five times the amount over the chest in front.

Never begin a journey until breakfast is eaten.

After speaking, singing or preaching in a warm room in winter, do not leave it for at least ten minutes, and even then close the mouth, put on the gloves, wrap up the neck, and put on a cloak or overcoat before passing out of the door; the neglect of these has laid many a good and useful man in a permature grave.

Never speak under a hoarseness, especially if it requires an effort, or gives a hurting or a painful feeling, for it often results in a permanent loss of voice, or a long life of invalidism.—*Hall's Journal of Health.*

OBEYING ORDERS—FUNNY AXES.—The managers of the Grand Trunk Railway, in Canada, last year, desiring a large quantity of axes for use along the line of their road, and having no confidence in American mechanics, set one of their scientific men to make a pattern of the axes required. The pattern in due time was completed and sent to England, with an order for 2,500 axes after the pattern sent. The house receiving the order went immediately to work to fill it, and a few months ago shipped to the managers of the road at Montreal the axes as ordered. Upon receiving their property, however, the scientific men found that not one ax out of the whole 2,500 had a *hole* in it to receive the handle! They were made according to the order—"exactly like the pattern." They have the axes for sale now in Montreal.

[We clip the above from an exchange, and give it for what it is worth. The managers of the Grand Trunk Railway should know that the best wood-choppers' axes in the world are made in the United States; the English axes cannot compare with them in any respect.—EDS.

RAILROAD ACCIDENTS.—The number of accidents on our railroads last year was 79, by which 129 persons were killed. These do not include those caused by the carelessness of travelers themselves, or from persons crossing or walking on railroad tracks when overtaken by trains.

TAKE CARE OF YOUR EYES!—One of the most eminent American divines, who has for some time been compelled to forego the pleasure of reading, has spent thousands of dollars in vain, and lost years of time, in consequence of getting up several hours before day and studying by artificial light. His eyes will never get well.

Multitudes of men and women have made their eyes weak for life, by the too free use of eyesight in reading small print and doing fine sewing. In view of these things, it will be well to observe the following rules in the use of the eyes:—

Avoid all sudden changes between light and darkness.

Never begin to read, or write, or sew, for several minutes after coming from darkness to a bright light.

Never read by twilight, or moonlight, or on a very cloudy day.

Never read or sew directly in front of the light, or window, or door.

It is best to have the light fall from above obliquely, over the left shoulder.

Never sleep so that, on the first awakening, the eyes shall open on the light of a window.

Do not use the eyesight by light so scant that it requires an effort to discriminate.

The moment you are instinctively prompted to rub the eyes, that moment cease using them.

If the eyelids are glued together, on waking up, do not forcibly open them; but apply the saliva with the finger—it is the speediest dilutant in the world; then wash your eyes and face in warm water.—*Hall's Journal of Health.*

KENTUCKY BLUE GRASS.—There is no subject which deserves more attention from eastern and northern farmers than the best grass as food for their cattle. At the present moment there is a great scarcity of hay in northern and western New York; it is selling for $16 per tun, and many farmers have sold off considerable of their live stock owing to inability to feed them. It is generally believed, now, that too little attention has been paid to raising the proper kind of grasses for cattle feed, timothy being the most common. Now is the time for farmers to discuss and cogitate on the new movements which they should make in agriculture during the present year. We have been informed that the famous Kentucky blue grass would be a great improvement, if cultivated in the eastern and midland States. It bears the summer heats and drouths well in close rich soils, and is a perennial. In western New York, where it has been introduced, it continues green as late as December, affording feed for both cattle and sheep after other grasses have failed to do so. It is a subject worthy of consideration and experiment.

WHEAT STRAW—ITS VALUE AS FODDER.—In regard to feeding wheat straw, Mr. Mechi, the celebrated agriculturist of England. calculates when fed to cattle it is worth more per acre than if plowed in for farm manure. If cut up and mixed with meal or bran of grain, it makes a very valuable food for cattle. Mr. Mechi's method of feeding is as follows:—He feeds each of his own cows, daily, on twenty pounds fine cut straw, eight pounds hay, five pounds rape cake, two pounds bean meal, seven-eights pounds bran, seven-eights maltcombs—all of these being properly moistened in hot water, the straw requiring more than the rest—thirty-five ponnds mangel or Swedish turnips. The essential points are warmth and moisture, the cattle being well sheltered and duly cared for. The straw is a most nutritious food, one hundred pounds of it contain seventy-two of muscle, fat, and heat-producing substances. The soluble fattening substances are equal to eighteen and a half pounds of oil to every one hundred pounds.

POISONOUS TOYS.—A Belgium medical journal gives an account of the narrow escape from death of a child, about a year old, by poison. It appeared to be in dreadful pain, and foamed at the mouth, and upon being taken to an apothecary at Bossu, it was found that it had been poisoned by sucking the painted face of a doll. The white lead in paint is one of the most powerful poisons known, and the journal very properly suggests that toy-makers should be prohibited using poisonous substances in painted playthings.