

Passing of the Walnut

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PASSING OF THE WALNUT.

At Wabash, Indiana, the other day was enacted a somewhat pathetic scene. The last merchantable walnut logs had been brought to the city on twenty-one wagons. The procession passed through the business portion of the city, and some of the older ones said it looked very much like a funeral procession, and expressed themselves: "There goes the last of the black walnut!" When one lets memory run back to pioneer days in Indiana, and remembers with what prodigality black walnut was used for all purposes it is quite enough to bring sombre thoughts. That everything must pass away at some time or other is a foregone conclusion. The deer, the prairie chicken, the wild turkey and the buffalo have ever been used to point to the wicked prodigality of man; but now that the inanimate denizens of the same forests and prairies have been sacrificed, it is a double grief to those who saw them in their magnificence, to see them passing away until there is not a vestige left worth naming. During the last sixty years there has been enough walnut timber burned up in log heaps in the heavily timbered states to pay the national debt if it were standing today, with its accumulated growth. Why was it thus sacrificed? Merely to get it out of the way. Walnut is said to have required the best soil on which to grow, and the mere fact that the trees were growing on certain portions of the land to be "cleared up" for farming purposes sealed their doom; for it was the land the pioneer was after and not the timber. Some years ago it was discovered that black walnut was the finest wood from which to make counters, bedsteads, tables, chairs and desks, and the country was searched for it in every nook and corner. The wooded portions of Iowa did not escape; for in 1883, and later, some men came out here from the East and went up and down our rivers buying and cutting all the walnut timber they could find. It was rafted down to Des Moines and sawed up into lumber or shipped

away in the bulk by rail. Since the cutting of these supplies this kind of timber has become most valuable, and men who used walnut beams for their barns erected forty years ago, have only to name the price for the walnut lumber, old as it is, and there will be a buyer for every foot of it. In some instances old walnut rails have been bought, of which to make gun stocks, and the purchasers hugged themselves because of their good fortune. Some day there will be a great cry for this favorite wood which cannot be responded to for the reason of the improvidence of the men who have an abundance of land; but did not have the foresight to plant walnut trees and have them coming along to meet the new demands. On examination of some of the logs which were accepted as marketable, it has been found that many of them were not more than fifty years old. Had a few thousand acres of waste land been planted half a century ago, there would now be a supply; but as it is the coming generations will have to wait. In some of the older states there were stately trees of the coveted walnut standing; but when prices were offered for them which seemed fabulous to the owners, they were sold root and branch and carted off to the ever-hungry saw mills, and latterly to fill the heart's desires of those who must have walnut furniture, no matter what the cost. Some of the first houses in Des Moines were built of walnut lumber almost entirely from foundation to the rafters and siding. The old house occupied for so many years by Wesley Redhead, built in 1853-4, on Locust street, lately torn down, had walnut weather-boarding, sawed from our native lumber and planed by hand in the usual laborious way; and many of our old houses and churches were built of the same material; only to give place to the march of progress. If our forefathers could have seen sixty years in advance, their children and grand children might now have had fortunes galore and "money to throw at the birds!"—*Tacitus Hussey in the Mail and Times, Des Moines, July 21, 1900.*

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