

THE CONSTITUTION

Y 30, 1882.—TWELVE PAGES.

"We sell about 8,000,000 pounds yearly, or say 300 cars. People haven't yet learned to raise their own bacon in this country, and, as they are obliged to have meat, we sell it to them. They are improving in this line, however, and I doubt if our trade will amount to quite as much this year."

"And you think Athens is on a boom?"

"Undoubtedly. I have never known so much building going on as now, and the prospects are even brighter now than they have ever been. The long locked up capital is beginning to come out, and we feel pretty sure now of a successful future. Our railroad facilities are gradually getting better, while the general outlook is promising enough."

Leaving this house I come now to another which is ranked among the strongest and staunchest of the city.

A. C. DOBBS.

"I am seeking information about Athens," I said to Mr. S. C. Dobbs, as I entered his establishment yesterday morning. "Will you tell me something about your business?"

"I do not mind," he returned, "have a seat."

"Athens seems in a stir; do you take much stock in her present activity?"

"Well, I reckon as much as anybody. We have never known so much bustle in business circles, and as for the general one of the spirit of improvement, surely the like has never been seen."

Mr. Dobbs is one of the representative merchants of Athens, and when he speaks it is not simply to hear himself talk. He went through the "late unpleasantness" and came home penniless, starting his present enormous business on nothing. By nothing but the closest attention to his affairs, he worked steadily along, never having or seeking the advice of a partner, and his success is solely due to his own individual enterprise brought to bear upon the trade in the right way.

"I am glad that you are here," he said, "for we all like THE CONSTITUTION because it is losing fast the name of being a local journal, and is now reaching out its arms to benefit all of Georgia and the south. Up here we think there is no paper like THE CONSTITUTION, and it is putting in its shoulder bits in the right direction. Every time it shows up a Georgia town it helps the resources of the state. I shall be only too glad to tell you anything I know. I am also glad that you are so well pleased with our town; we have a young giant here and intend letting the world know it."

"What is your business?"

"I deal in staple dry goods, groceries and provisions."

"Do you sell at wholesale?"

"Yes, both wholesale and retail. I travel a man all the time, and sell over a quarter of a million dollars worth of goods and fertilizers. In goods alone I sell over \$200,000 annually, while my fertilizers run the amount up to \$250,000."

"Athens seems to have a very good territory."

"Yes, I sell down as far as Gainesville, go into South Carolina, almost the entire length of the Georgia railroad, over the Elberton branch and throughout northeast Georgia."

"Are you satisfied with your freight rates?"

"I cannot say that I could complain, because we get just as good rates on nearly everything that Atlanta and Augusta do, and this ought to satisfy us. We are now getting meat over the Baltimore and Ohio railroad at as good rates from Chicago as Atlanta enjoyed. No, we cannot kick against freight rates. What we want, however, is better railroad facilities. We want that Madison road, which will give us a bran new country and give us a new and abundant supply of cotton."

has been more inclined to work for the welfare of Athens than these gentlemen. Mr. John Talmadge was one of the prime movers in the Northeastern railroad project, which has proven of more solid advantage to the city than any enterprise ever undertaken. I think I may safely say that the success of the house is due as much to their inclination to foster a spirit of public enterprise and live up to it as anything else. Nothing ever comes along that they do not have a hand in. One of the first men I met here was Mr. Hodgson, and through his courtesy I was given a delightful drive over the city, and saw for the first time what a pretty place it is. Nothing wins the stranger's heart as these small courtesies, and nothing so helps to give the town a good name as this feeling of hospitality to visitors. If I had been here and failed to receive these little favors, perhaps I would not have gone away with such pleasant memories. There is nothing "stuck up" about the people of Athens; a more whole-souled, hospitable set I never saw. True, there is a touch of culture and refinement everywhere visible, but then the commonest mind must be impressed by it.

THE BUSINESS.

When Mr. Talmadge had finished a ramble through the building, I fell in again with Mr. Hodgson, who fell to, and gave me some interesting facts about the volume of their business.

"In what do you deal?" I asked.

"Groceries of all kinds, dry goods and shoes."

"What amount of business do you do in a year?"

"About half a million now, but we must soon pass that, because our business has been gradually gaining since its commencement, and the proportionate increase is kept up each year. The coming season promises so well that we expect to do our heaviest trade."

Athens has probably proven a puzzle to many people throughout Georgia who have heard of her prosperity, but they would be astounded were we able to unlock from these private vaults all the money that is hoarded there by our older wealthy citizens, and which should properly be given to the business of the town. But I guess you have heard that already this money is gradually coming to the surface, and we enter our new era of prosperity with encouragements on every hand."

"I presume you wholesale?"

"Yes, and retail also. We consider that our house does the largest trade in Athens, next to Reams, Nicholson & Co. We sell goods in every hamlet, town and village of northeast Georgia, as far as Clarksville and nearly to Augusta and up to Madison."

"Do you use the drummer system?"

"Yes, we travel two men all the time, and find we must do this in order to keep pace with the rest of the world."

"Can you compete with Atlanta?"

"We sell goods just as low as any town in the state not excepting Atlanta, Macon, Augusta or Savannah. We are now getting terminal rates, which, of course, puts us on just as good a footing as anybody. We have just as much right to sell goods two hundred miles from our doors as Atlanta. The Northeastern road was our salvation, but we now need other outlets to give us our true importance, and we intend to have them. Our people are showing more of Atlanta's spirit than ever before, and I cannot name a single leading man in Athens who does not come up to the scratch when any important measure for our prosperity is put on foot."

"How many men do you employ?"

"In all about thirty. It requires a wagon to a number of business types of which are

annually, and if it is added to my other business, the figure mounts up to \$650,000 as the gross amount. I have an elegant new fire proof warehouse made of brick and tin which I built myself. It is 110 by 116 feet. I also built my store house, 33x130 feet in size."

The warehouse is just in the rear of the store and is a model of convenience every way. "I have an advantage," said Mr. Dobbs, "in being nearer than anyone else to the new Georgia depot. I am going to extend my warehouse, making it about half as large again which will give me enough capacity, in all nearly 17,000 square feet of space."

"How is business just at this season?"
"We cannot enter a single word of complaint. At present we are selling from \$12,000 to \$15,000 per month. In the winter season, however, I average about \$25,000 monthly. My trade in corn and meat is very heavy. Then I am agent for Chess, Carley & Co., for kerosene oil, and get it by the car load. My oil trade is a big item in the business. I am also sole agent for Coats's thread. I have had to compete with the strongest men in Athens and have built all I have out of my own means. I am strictly a cash buyer and seller. The surest sign of our country's prosperity is that the credit system is fast playing out and people are paying the money for what they get or else they do not buy. This bonding business was a terrible humbug as well as a calamity on the people."

Thanking Mr. Dobbs for his information, I went around on Clayton street and saw

TALMADGE, HODGSON & CO.

This firm has had a career of which they should really be proud. No house in Athens stands higher in public estimation, and I have never met a more perfect set of gentlemen in my life. They seem thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the age, and whenever they can plant a shoulder drive in the interest of Athens, they come squarely to the front and strike boldly and fearlessly. They are all young men under thirty-five, and are alive to every new enterprise that comes along. Just now they are taking the leading part in the water works that are soon to be erected, and to their efforts, probably, more than any others in town the success of the water works project is due. They have worked hard, studied the best interest of Athens, and know just exactly what the city wants. I am not surprised that they stand so high as citizens no more than I am that they take such rank as solid, sterling business men.

THE HISTORY OF THIS HOUSE has been a peculiar one in point of brilliant achievement, and serves as a valuable lesson to young men growing up seeking callings.

The present firm was started some fifteen years ago by Mr. John E. Talmadge in a little corner just across the street, where he kept a peanut stand. At this place the first bill of goods he ever bought was from Reeves, Nicholson & Co., amounting to two hundred dollars, and on which he was given thirty days time. It is needless to say that with the same promptness which has since characterized the obligations of the firm, Mr. Talmadge met this one without an hour's delay and thus established a permanent credit.

Some time after this his brother, Mr. R. G. Talmadge came in and the two conducted the business together. It was not long before they had more than they could do and sought larger quarters. Everybody praised the young fellows, and their reliability brought them friends from every quarter. This season of prosperity continued until 1870, when Mr. E. R. Hodgson was given a third interest in the house. He had just returned from Poughkeepsie, was a thorough accountant and his position was to manage the business and books. How well he succeeded is evidenced from the fact that to-day the house is doing a business of \$500,000 annually with every year seeing it grow. I think it is no wild statement to make that within five years, granting the boom now on Athens will continue, their trade will creep up close to one million dollars. If there is anything in signs this hope will certainly be realized.

As I said before, no set of men in Athens

these things we claim and which we are prepared to demonstrate. We are

1. The largest tobacco dealers in the city.
2. The largest flour dealers.
3. The largest general city trade.

In tobacco we probably double any other house in the city, our trade in this branch alone being about \$75,000.

Our flour trade is enormous, and we often buy ten cars at one order. In ten cars there are 250,000 pounds—1,250 barrels.

"What is this worth?"

"About \$1,000 a car, or \$10,000 for the ten. Yearly we handle over 100 cars, 2,500,000 pounds, 12,500 barrels; worth \$100,000.

"Our city trade brings us in \$60,000. These items will give you an idea as to the extent of our business, and they need no embellishment at my hands; they speak for themselves."

"In meat," continued Mr. Hodgson, "we handle one hundred cars annually, or 2,500,000 pounds."

"How about corn?"

"I guess we sell over two hundred cars of corn, mostly western corn. Two hundred thousand bushels of corn is a big quantity for one house, but our figures will reach that far. We have just gotten in five cars of bagging and ten car loads of salt in addition to what I have mentioned.

"Another important and rather odd feature with us, is that during the Christmas holidays we ship from two to three solid cars of candy. One would think that a car load of candy would supply all the children and dandies in northeast Georgia, but we send out three and know that our competitors send out large quantities besides."

"Do you adopt the cash system?"

"Almost entirely. Sometimes we sell to gilt edge parties on thirty days, which is equivalent to cash, of course. The credit system is fast becoming a thing of the past all over this section, the people having awakened to the fact that it doesn't pay."

"Do you buy cotton?"

"No, but we sell it. We only inaugurated this branch of our business last year, and that season we sold 12,000 bales of cotton. This business is entirely in my charge," said Mr. Hodgson, "and I am determined to have it a success. We have built a large fire proof brick warehouse, covering one acre, or 200x225 feet, 45,000 square feet. We have another smaller warehouse for storing grain, bagging and heavy groceries. We sell cotton for everybody, and have a warehouse capacity of 15,000 bales. We give the highest grades and obtain the highest possible prices on all cotton entrusted to our keeping. We also make liberal advances on cotton stored with us. We have plenty of means with which to make liberal advances, and we do it. With our cotton interests, the sum of our business foots up \$1,100,000."

After a look at the building, which is three stories high and 85x75 feet, I wended my way to the office of

ORR & HUNTER,

the largest brokerage dealers in Athens. This is comparatively a new house, having only been in existence about four years. Mr. Orr came here from Newnan, Mr. Hunter being a native Athenian. Said Mr. Orr, in response to my inquiry about the prosperity of Athens: "Yes, we are now on the high road towards becoming an important commercial and railroad center, and we, with the others, are willing to join in anything that will help push us ahead."

"Do you think you will have sufficient railroad facilities?"

"Without doubt. The continuation of the Northeastern to Knoxville, the building of the Jug Tavern branch and the competition of the Georgia Midland via Madison and Monticello to Griffin will give us all we will need for a while, at any rate."

Continuing, he said, "Athens has never known such a boom as she now enjoys. Two years ago we only received about 18,000 bales of cotton. Last year we got 45,000 bales, and this year we must necessarily go over 50,000 bales. The present crop prospects have put everybody in a glow of interest over what we are to have. Our general