

S. KARPEN & BROS.' PREMISES.

From humble beginnings, S. Karpen & Bros., the well-known and highly successful firm, now stand at the head in their line of work. In 1881, S. Karpen, with his brothers, Oscar and Adolph, established a factory for making upholstered goods in a little basement at Milwaukee avenue and Tell street, under the firm name of S. Karpen & Bros., a title that has been retained to the present day. Industry and strict attention to business soon served to bring such a volume of trade that, in less than a year, more room was required, and a move was made to 204 East Lake street, where two lofts were occupied as factory and salesrooms.

In three years' time larger quarters were required, and a removal across the street to 205 followed, where three floors were occupied. The Karpen goods were becoming very popular with the trade, as the closest attention was given to the selection of all of the materials entering into the construction of their special lines, and every article produced was precisely as represented, while the prompt shipment of goods was a factor of no mean importance in the rapid growth of the business. But more room was soon in demand, and in 1884 the premises at 42-44 South Canal street were taken. Here three double lofts were occupied, and business kept growing apace, until a disastrous fire in 1889 destroyed the entire factory and the stock. It was totally destroyed, and but partly covered by insurance.

Not daunted by this misfortune, the indomitable energy of S. Karpen & Bros. was in evidence, for two days after the fire, premises were leased at 2098-3004 Wabash avenue and business was going right along as if nothing had happened. Here the firm occupied the entire buildings, shortly afterward purchasing a little frame structure corner of North Wood and Park streets, utilizing it for a frame factory. This was the beginning of the large plant which S. Karpen & Bros. have since erected. In 1891, the property occupied by the old factory was purchased and a five-story brick factory building was erected and equipped with the most improved machinery and appliances known at that time. Here 100,000 square feet of room were afforded and their line of upholstered goods, including couches, lounges, sofas and chairs, from the cheapest to the most expensive kinds, were manufactured as well as a full line of lodge and pulpit furniture, they making and carrying in stock a larger line than any other house in the world. They made a specialty of new patterns. Their sales and shipments were on a gigantic scale, and the reputation of S. Karpen & Bros. as the leading house in their line, was firmly established and recognized by the trade in all sections of the country.

About the same time, namely 1891, the property at 154-155 Michigan avenue was purchased and occupied as salesrooms, where a complete line of the firm's goods was displayed. This property, originally bought for \$35,000, was sold in January of this year to the Chicago Gas and Coke Co., for \$105,000—not a bad investment. The gas company needed the property and S. Karpen & Bros.

finally yielded, and were consequently called upon to look elsewhere for "house and shelter," so to speak. After looking around, and knowing a good thing when they saw it, the old Richelieu Hotel, 186-187 Michigan avenue, was obtained. The building has been remodeled, in fact practically rebuilt, as a new front of ornamental iron and terra cotta has been put in and another story added, making seven in all. A view of the building, as it will appear when completed, accompanies this article.

The firm expects to occupy the new sales building some time in June, and will use the first (store) floor and basement, together with the fifth, sixth and seventh floors, as sales and exhibition rooms, with sales office on the first floor. The second, third and fourth floors will be rented to other furniture manufacturers for salesrooms. The new building will be attractive, architecturally speaking, and the facilities afforded for carrying on the business of this popular house will be increased greatly. The location is all that could be desired, is central, and is within five minutes' walk of all of the leading hotels and clubs.

The new factory buildings, twelve in number, occupy an entire city block, between West Twenty-first and Twenty-second streets, and South Union street and the river. Here will be found the general office of the firm, housed in a separate building 40x40 feet, three stories high. The factories proper, making available 200,000 square feet of space, will be divided into the frame factory, finishing department, upholstery department and shipping department. In the latter consideration they enjoy the greatest advantages, having facilities, for loading and shipping twenty carloads of furniture daily, if necessary, a spur of the C. B. & Q. R. R. running the entire length of the shipping shed. The dry kilns are the largest in Chicago, with a capacity of 280,000 feet daily.

It is unnecessary, perhaps, to state that the "largest factory in the world making upholstered furniture," will be fitted with the most modern and best machinery to be had. It would not be S. Karpen & Bros. if it were otherwise. The additional room will permit the proper division of labor, reducing the cost of manufacturing to a minimum, which they were unable to accomplish in the old premises for lack of space. The tufting machine, of which this firm controls the patents—twelve in number—was first operated here, and since then shop rights have been granted to about seventeen other concerns in the United States. The machine does its work quickly, thoroughly and uniformly, and is a great advantage over hand work. S. Karpen & Bros. also do an important export trade. They sell more goods in New York City than any other city in the Union outside of Chicago, which is saying a great deal.

As to the personnel of the firm, all of the brothers were admitted successively, following the original three, so that eight have now an interest in the business. Portraits of the whole "push" appear herewith, together with that of B. Karpen, deceased, who had a host of friends in the trade. The individuals constituting the firm of S. Karpen & Bros., are S. Karpen, who attends to all of the buying; O. Karpen, who runs the frame factory; A.

Karpen, chief of the sales department; I. Karpen, superintendent of the upholstery department; M. Karpen, traveling salesman in western territory; W. Karpen, traveling salesman in the North and Southwest; L. Karpen, who looks after the city trade, and J. Karpen, who has charge of credits and the correspondence at the factory, and who extends the "glad hand" to the newspaper men.