

# Who Fired the Bush?

## Loss of Lives and Property Repeated in New Ontario Despite Earlier Experiences

**H**UNDREDS are dead. Hundreds are homeless. Hundreds are penniless. Thousands are bereaved. Millions of feet of valuable standing timber have been wiped out by the recent fires in Northern Ontario.

Whose fault was it?

Was it the fault of the settler who invoked the aid of fire and favorable wind to help him clear his bit of land?

Was it the fault of the railways, whose engines emit dangerous sparks?

Or was it the fault of the Government?

It is always easy to blame somebody. The danger lies in blaming the wrong man, as a rule. But, if there were an inquest held on the remains of any one of the—as yet—unnumbered victims of this Northern Ontario fire, it is safe to say the verdict would be a



Cochrane rising from the flames. New buildings erected before the ruins were cold.

A typical settler.

A refugee family having its first meal in many hours in the shadow of the relief train.

The ruins of the T. & N. O. station at Matheson. The relief train has just pulled in.

Unloading supplies from the relief train for the survivors. The Government's relief measures were prompt and generous. The Provincial officials were quick to let it be known that they would undertake all relief measures. Nevertheless generous donations poured north from private persons.

verdict of criminal negligence against the Government in whose jurisdiction these forests lay.

Even if the settlers did start the blaze—

Even if it was a spark from an engine—

Even though careless campers or all three causes may be cited—

The real blame falls upon a Government that provides



too few fire rangers and inspectors. The Government should have made it impossible or unprofitable for rash settlers to clear their land by fire. It should have made clear that heavy penalties would be assessed against offenders, and it should have seen to it that there was a vigilant police force to watch for offenders.

Furthermore:

It should devise ways of helping the settler, so that, in his anxiety to keep the wolf from the door, he would not be tempted to set the bush on fire.

As for the railways—British Columbia has long since enforced the use of oil-burning engines. That is because British Columbia understands the value of its forests.

The fire in Northern Ontario serves to illustrate the inefficiency of governments—Liberal and Conservative alike—in respect to agricultural assistance. Both the Federal and the Provincial Governments spend yearly hundreds of thousands of dollars in teaching our farmers how to farm. Experiments of many kinds are carried on but too many of them are theoretical, not practical. Too many practical problems have been ignored while theoretic research has been going on. For the rehabilitation of the burned-out areas, and for the benefit of all farm districts in