

A Visit to the Devastated Claybelt

Officers of the Canadian Forestry Association Find That Sentiment in Northern Ontario Favors Restrictive Legislation

The Canadian Forestry Association, through two of its officers, made a preliminary investigation of fire conditions in the Claybelt region between Haileybury and Cochrane on the T. and N. O. Railway during the week of August 14th. Personal observation along the main and branch lines of the railway and some miles into the back country and numerous interviews with settlers, government employees, railroad officers, merchants, etc., strongly supported the Association's contention that Northern Ontario need not suffer another catastrophe if the Provincial Government at once reorganizes its protective system on really modern lines.

Danger Ahead.

It was everywhere admitted, with the possible exception of the Matheson district, where the country is stripped, that the risk of fire in future years has been greatly increased by the killing of so much green bush during the past month. The dead, and therefore very inflammable spruce forests, which now lie across so much of the farming country from Matheson northward, add an element of decided danger to the situation as it was a few months ago. It is well known that it usually takes no less than three or four successive fires to thoroughly clean up an area of standing timber. How to offset these perils to life and property is a problem which can and must be solved by the Department of Lands and Forests of Ontario. The Claybelt has had scarcely any fire protec-

tion worthy the name, except immediately along the railways, and the Department tacitly confesses that this section must take its own chances. The harvest of that policy has been so gruesome and costly that the forethought of the Government in the matter of rehabilitating the settlers will logically extend to giving their lives and their homes a reasonable guarantee of fire immunity for the future. Toward that sensible goal, all true friends of Northern Ontario are eagerly looking.

A Safe Claybelt.

The disaster of July 29th, 1916, had its origin with settlers' slash fires. That point is undisputed. The remedy for bush fires must start with the cause. Wider clearings to protect the towns are an obvious necessity, easy to accomplish. But the safety of the settler in the heart of the bush is another and more serious problem. The average settler is, to a considerable extent, an isolated unit. He must do his own clearing. After two or three years' work, from 70 to 80 per cent. of his homestead usually remains in bush. He uses fire to rid his soil of the encumbrance of slash and stumps, and fire is plainly a necessity for such a purpose. It does a valuable service in clearing that particular piece of land of the overlying debris. It does no genuine permanent service, and often does untold injury when it escapes from the clearing into his green bush, for it destroys the trees as marketable pulpwood, and quad-