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The Toronto Fire.

On Tuesday night of last week Toronto was visited by the most destructive fire in the history of the city. The fire had its origin in the E. & S. Currie Neckwear Factory on the north side of Wellington street about eight o'clock in the evening and soon gained a headway which defied all the efforts of the fire department to control. From Lorne street, through the very heart of the old business city to Yonge street, and north half way to King street, covering an area to fourteen acres, where on Tuesday there stood a large section of Toronto's energetic business houses there stretched on Wednesday a desert of tumble down walls and twisted girders. In all 123 buildings were consumed. The printing and stationary business of the city suffered heavily. The houses of the following firms—said to be the six largest in Canada—were completely destroyed: Warwick Bros. & Rutter, Buntin Ried, Brown Bros., Barber & Ellis, Copp & Clark and Davis & Henderson, have been completely destroyed. The financial loss is of course very heavy. What is said to be a conservative estimate, places it at over \$12,000,000. To cover this there is said to be nearly \$9,000,000 insurance, the bulk of which is in English and Scottish Companies, so that the loss to the business interests of the city will not be as great as might be inferred from the magnitude of the fire. Some of the local insurance companies, however, will sustain heavy losses, and some of the weaker ones may have to suspend. A Toronto despatch referring to the effects of the fire says: "The general impression among bank managers and capitalists of the city is that the catastrophe, while necessarily entailing a very severe drawback to the whole business community, will not be followed by any financial panic; in fact few failures are looked for. It is pointed out that the fire losses were for the most part sustained by the wealthiest men in the city, practically all of whom were able to stand fairly heavy loss without succumbing to the blow, and who kept their property well insured. Fortunately, spring orders were pretty well delivered and the stocks in the warehouses were below the average. The fire will of course have the effect of throwing a large number of persons out of employment. One despatch says the number will be as large as 10,000. This however must be largely exaggerated. . . . Later despatches place the estimates both of loss and insurance at considerably higher figures than those given above."

Fall Wheat and Fruit.

The prospects for fall wheat in Ontario, taking the Province as a whole, are said to be fairly good, but this is not universally the case. In some counties, particularly in Kent and Brant, the crop is a failure and the land which had been devoted to fall wheat will have to be plowed up. For the most part however, the reports indicate that the heavy snow fall of the past winter has been favorable to the wheat crop. The general condition in Ontario is believed to be decidedly better than in the United States where the fall wheat crop is reported to be far below the average. In some districts young fruit trees and grape vines have suffered very seriously from being girdled by mice. In some cases, it is said, growers will lose eighty per cent. of young plum, cherry and apple trees. Not only were the young trees attacked, but in some cases bearing trees of all kinds have been completely destroyed. Vineyards—especially—have also been seriously damaged. An instance is mentioned in which fifty per cent. of a vineyard has been destroyed. Blackberries and currant bushes also have not escaped. Such havoc among the fruit trees by mice, it is said, has not been known in twenty years, and it is attributed to the unusual depth of snow and the scarcity of food for the mice. In some cases the trees were girdled two and three feet high. Orchards and vineyards which were not carefully cultivated suffered the most, as the long grass served as a harbor for the mice. A few orchards were saved by wrapping tarred paper around the trees and others by banking in various ways.

The following account of the Japanese attack upon Port Arthur in connection with which the Russian warship Petropavlovsk was sunk and the Pobiedna was disabled is from the correspondent of the London Times, who wit-

nessed the movements of the contending fleets from the Times steamer Haimun:

"Discovering from various sources that the entrance to Port Arthur was still practicable, Admiral Togo determined to try a new manoeuvre in order to effect the destruction of the Russian fleet, and his scheme was as follows: He determined to mine the mouth of the harbor and place a weak squadron outside the port in order to entice the Russians out, while he himself, taking advantage of the fogs on the coast, lay off prepared to pounce in and catch the Russians at sea if they succeeded in evading the mines. How successful the ruse proved is unfolded by the following narrative: During the night of the 12th instant two divisions of destroyers and one torpedo flotilla, escorting the Koryo Maru, a mining vessel, arrived off Port Arthur. The destroyer flotillas protected both fleets, and the Koryo Maru went boldly in. The action of the vessel is typical of the boldest daring of the Japanese. Although the concentrated beams of four searchlights showed up every spar and rail on the Koryo Maru, and although a merciless fire swept around her, she accomplished her object, and came out again undamaged, without the Russians discovering her designs. Supporting the enterprise was a squadron consisting of two first-class and four second-class cruisers, and at daybreak the interest centred in them. The day broke with the usual mist over the land, though out at sea it was fairly clear. South of Port Arthur it was quite clear, but remained thick in the direction of Tallienwan. The Russians were all on the alert, owing to the firing during the night. Admiral Makaroff at 8 a. m. seeing only a weak squadron menacing the port, put to sea with the following force:—Battleships Petropavlovsk, Poitava and Pobiedna; cruisers Diana, Askold and Novik. These were joined outside by the cruiser Bayan, which had been engaged with the destroyers in the night. The Japanese cruiser squadron, seeing the Russians had cleared the mines, steamed out to sea with the Russians with full steam on after them. The latter opened a rapid long-range fire, the Japanese replying at intervals. When the Japanese had drawn the Russians out some fifteen miles, they communicated the situation to Admiral Togo by wireless telegraphy. Admiral Togo, unfortunately, was thirty miles away, lurking under the cover of the mist and rain squalls. Immediately on receipt of the message he signalled the Kasuga and Nishin to join the battleship squadron, and went forward at full steam. By a piece of bad luck the wind freshened at this moment, dispelling the mist, and the Russian Admiral, desiring the smoke, guessed the ruse, and put about at full steam for Port Arthur, all the Japanese ships pursuing him at their utmost speed. It was a magnificent spectacle, but the Russians had not been enticed far enough, and had steamed under the protection of the forts before Admiral Togo arrived within effective range. Then a most extraordinary contretemps happened. The Russian leading ship believed to be the Petropavlovsk, because she was covered with signal flags, listed heavily, and in an incredibly short time sank. Admiral Togo's design was successful; she had struck on one of the Koryo's mines. In a moment this fearful catastrophe threw the whole Russian line into confusion, and the vessels could be seen firing indiscriminately into the water in their immediate front, in order to destroy others of these terrible engines of maritime warfare. This was just about 10.30 a. m. The remaining Russian vessels, having cleared their front, steamed independently into the harbor, covered by the fire of the forts on Golden Hill. They were favored by the mist, which still hung about the approaches of the port, and gained the inside by noon."

The Value of the Torpedo.

The story of the sinking of the Petropavlovsk by a Japanese countermine, says the New York Evening Post, indicates a military strategy such as we believe no Occidental nation has ever surpassed. Admiral Togo's plan required an extraordinary combination of sheer intelligence and daring in its executants. The channel between the Russian torpedoes had to be plotted by distant triangulation, unarmored ships at night had to run into that narrow waterway, plant it with mines, and keep clear both of the Russian torpedoes and of their own; all this under fire from the harbor fleet. Probably the annals of war hardly show another trap of this refined ingenuity. To students of naval tactics, however, the tragedy of the Petropavlovsk is merely the culmination of a continued demonstration of the value of torpedo attack. Granting that this sort of countermining is without precedent, it is probably less significant than the whole series of attacks on the Port Arthur fleet by torpedo craft and other unarmored vessels.

The Grand Trunk Pacific.

The Grand Trunk Pacific Bill in its amended form passed its second reading in the House of Commons on Wednesday last by a majority of fifty-five. The debate on the bill oc-

cupied about a fortnight, and on the whole the country is to be congratulated on the fact that no more of the time of Parliament was occupied in the discussion. It does not appear that much new light has been shed upon the subject. The vote taken means of course that Parliament has endorsed the changes in the agreement of last year asked for by the G. T. P. Company. The Government's supporters in Parliament have stood by their leaders quite solidly in this phase of the Government's railway policy, and the new project is endorsed by about the full strength of the Government's majority. The debate of this season, as well as that of last year, has shown at least that a great deal could be said against the Government's project. That might indeed be the case in regard to any scheme of trans-continental railway extension which the Government could have brought forward, since along any line that might be proposed some serious difficulties would have to be encountered and objections could be urged. It is difficult to say whether or not the adoption of the Grand Trunk Pacific scheme will strengthen the Government. Of course the building of so great a work will create a demand for labor and promote business activity for several years to come. We fancy, however, that the endorsement of the scheme would be more general and hearty if there were greater assurance of the productive character of the country through which a considerable portion of the new trans-continental highway is to run, and more proof that a really good route is obtainable. The people of these Maritime Provinces would also be glad if there were a stronger guarantee that when the road shall be completed the products of the West will principally find their way over it to Canadian ports for winter shipment rather than to United States ports.

The War.

From the Far East, during the past week, there has been little news of a definite and trustworthy character. There has been the usual harvest of unconfirmed and unconfirmable rumors, among which is one to the effect that the Japanese had lost 7,000 men, while attempting a landing near the mouth of the Yalu. There was an unfounded report a week or two ago that the Japanese had lost 1,500 men in an attempt to land at another point, and the story about 7,000 having been lost is perhaps from the same source. It is known from a despatch forwarded by Viceroy Alexieff to St. Petersburg that on Friday a Russian lieutenant and twenty men were killed at Port Arthur by a mine exploding under the stern of one of the Russian launches. There have been various reports of Japanese landings at Niu Chwang or at some other point on the Manchurian coast, but some of them have been contradicted, and others lack confirmation. There is said to be a strong concentration of Japanese troops on the south of the Yalu and according to reports the Russians on the northern side are prepared to resist advance. A Seoul despatch of Saturday says that the Japanese now extend thirty miles along the Yalu river, reaching from Yongampho to ten miles above Wiju, the Russians being strongest at Antung. A St. Petersburg despatch says that apparently reliable information in the possession of the general staff of the Russian army leads to the belief that the objective of the Japanese campaign does not involve the ambitious invasion of the interior of Manchuria with the purpose of reaching and overwhelming the main Russian army. Instead there seems to be a determination to stick as close as possible to the sea, where lies Japan's natural base of communications, she having established herself in Korea. It is not unlikely that this correctly describes Japan's policy.

—During the fiscal year just closed the American Baptists Missionary Union has reduced its debt by \$15,000. The debt now standing at \$8,000. This result is especially noteworthy and gratifying in view of the fact that there was an increase of \$50,000 in appropriations to meet normal growth of the Union's work. There has been, however, only a slight increase in donations from churches and individuals. The largest increase in the Union's income has come through legacies and matured annuities, which have yielded \$135,000 as compared with \$40,000 the year before. This source of income being so variable, it is evident that there is need of an enlargement of the regular sources of income in order that the Union may carry on its great work without embarrassment.