

# Editorial

## CANADA'S CAPITOL FIRE.

Whether the great conflagration in Ottawa last week was the result of incendiarism is still a questionable matter. It is doubtful if the Commission which is to investigate the origin of the Parliament Building fire will be able to satisfy itself as to whether it was the crime of an enemy, the caprice of a maniac, or the outcome of an accident. But, at all events, the Commission will take cognizance of the rapidity with which the fire spread and of the inflammable nature of the interior of the building.

As an edifice of architectural beauty the central structure of the Ottawa group of federal buildings has been the pride of Canada for half a century. Older than the Dominion itself, its corner stone was laid in 1860 by the Prince of Wales, the late King Edward VII. While the original building cost \$5,000,000, it is doubtful if an equal sum could replace the added embellishments and interior grandeur.

Its destruction has been serious; above all, in deplorable loss of life and in physical injury to many of our statesmen upon whose shoulders rests at this crisis grave responsibilities. Next in importance, probably, has been the obliteration of volumes of records, documents, parliamentary proceedings, papers, etc., not in the library or vaults. This loss will be felt for many years to come. There is also the serious disruption and distraction of an important parliamentary session. There is, lastly, the building loss.

That the fire leapt with incredible speed over the recently shellacked floors is common to the reports of many of the rescued. Induced by heavy drafts, a little headway, and the great edifice became a formidable fire trap.

It is to be hoped that Parliament will see its way clear to proceed immediately with the construction of a new federal home; that the design will demand the strictest devotion to the science of fireproofing, classical and grand though the architectural features may be made; that the idea of modern fireproof construction be extended without delay to other buildings of the Capitol group; and that the Government library, which by good fortune escaped with damage by water alone, will be among the first to receive attention in this respect. Had the fire destroyed the Ottawa library, Canada's loss would have been considerably greater than it is.

## THE COAL SITUATION IN SASKATCHEWAN.

There is a serious shortage of coal in the province of Saskatchewan at the present time, according to press dispatches. It was announced in the Provincial Legislature on January 31st that in a certain village people are closing their homes and going to live at the hotel, the latter being the only place securing a supply of coal. The report states further that farmers were driving 50 and 60 miles in search of purchasable fuel. The severity of winter conditions during the month of January practically paralyzed transportation facilities in many sections, and the fuel situation has accordingly become acute.

This seems strange in a province possessing large coal deposits. According to a recent report prepared by Mr. D. B. Dowling, of the Geological Survey, the Souris area, comprising eight townships, is estimated to contain 2,304,000,000 tons of coal, while the western portion of the province contains, in an area of about 5,900 square miles, deposits probably aggregating 24,000,000,000 tons. The latter figure is an approximate estimate, but the Souris deposits have been calculated from investigation of actual thickness and extent of seams.

Coal is of many varieties, however, and the Saskatchewan deposits furnish fuel of the lignite class only. Some of the physical characteristics of this lignite in its raw state prevent its successful and economical use. As a result, the production during recent years has been in no way comparable with the increase in population. There has, accordingly, been an increasing dependence upon outside sources of supply, with the resulting dearth of fuel at the time of greatest need, *viz.*, when the railways are tied up owing to stormy weather.

There are 12 operating coal mines in Saskatchewan. In 1914 these produced 232,299 tons of coal, averaging \$1.61 per ton. Although this is the largest output on record for the province, the average for the past four years has been 219,080 tons—extremely small in proportion to the needs of the province.

The importance of devising suitable methods of utilizing the large resources of lignite have been brought to the attention of the government and the results of investigations are now available. As large quantities of the same variety of lignite exist also in the province of Alberta, it is important that these investigations be followed up, although Alberta has a good supply of coals of harder and greater heat-giving varieties.

The Saskatchewan Government report, prepared about fifteen months ago by Mr. S. M. Darling, on the briquetting of Saskatchewan lignite, emphasized its adaptability for use for domestic and power purposes. In view of the high price of anthracite in the province, and more especially of the liability to coal famine, such as that now being experienced, the problem of developing local coal deposits should be thoroughly investigated.

## THE WINNIPEG-SHOAL LAKE AQUEDUCT.

As a result of a number of cracks that have appeared in some of the constructed portions of the Shoal Lake aqueduct, considerable interest has been aroused in Winnipeg by statements reflecting upon the engineers of the aqueduct scheme and upon the adopted design of the works. The statements of Mr. M. T. Cantell, formerly employed in the engineering office of the District, have created a certain amount of misapprehension in the minds

The Winnipeg office of The Canadian Engineer has been moved from Room 1008 to Room 1208, McArthur Building. The new telephone number is Main 2663. Mr. G. W. Coodall remains in charge of the office.