

PEAT FUEL :

ITS MANUFACTURE AND USE.

Life in a northern climate implies the free use of fuel. Abundance of fuel means comfort and the smooth working of the social and industrial machine; scarcity means inconvenience, distress and the dislocation of industries; absolute want of it would render the temperate regions of the earth uninhabitable. The prime necessity of ample supplies of so obviously important an article requires no proof; but if any were needed it has been thrust upon the people of Canada by the recent strike of the anthracite coal miners of Pennsylvania, and in a way calculated to open the eyes of the most unthinking. A generation ago such a strike would have excited little interest here, because the splendid hardwood forests of southern Ontario had not then disappeared, and good "body" beech and maple warmed the houses and generated steam in the mills and factories of the time. To-day the situation is changed. The dwindling forests have retreated to such a distance from "older" Ontario as to make wood expensive and scarce. All things considered, anthracite for domestic use and bituminous coal for steam raising are preferable to wood; and so partly for this reason, and partly because of the diminishing supplies of the native fuel and the increased facilities for procuring the foreign article, it has come about that the urban and town dwellers of Ontario almost wholly, and to a lesser, but still appreciable extent, farmers and villagers also now rely entirely upon coal for fuel. The number of coal-users is constantly increasing, and the area in which wood is the chief article of fuel is yearly retreating farther to the north.

One effect of the change has been to place the people of Ontario in a position of absolute and abject dependence on the coal barons—or coal miners, it matters little which—of a foreign state for the right to live. As to the merits of the dispute between the coal companies and the mine workers, the people of Ontario may have their opinion, but they have no voice whatever in its settlement, and can have no share in framing laws which might make a recurrence of it impossible. Their only privilege is to accept with gratitude whatever coal their dealers can induce the companies in Pennsylvania, whether mining or railway, to send across the border, and to pay such prices therefor as may be dictated by business slightly tempered with philanthropy.

It is not an easy matter to arrive at the total amount annually paid out for fuel by the people of Ontario. The quantity and cost of the coal consumed can be ascertained with much exactness, since it is practically all imported from a foreign country and the figures are therefore to be found in the trade and navigation tables, but the production and consumption of wood, which constitutes the source of heat for one-half the population or more, is not so easy to estimate. An attempt, however, may be made. According to the census of 1901 the population of Ontario was 2,182,947 persons, of whom 935,978 dwelt in the cities, towns and incorporated villages of the Province. The bulk of the people, 1,246,969 in number, are classed as "rural," and are made up of the farming community and those living in hamlets and places too small to be incorporated as separate municipalities. In view of the originally wooded condition of the country, it is probably within the mark to assume that wood is still the fuel mainly used by the rural population. True, much wood is used in the cities, towns and villages, and much coal in the country; but roughly speaking, urban dwellers are users of coal and country-dwellers of wood. Now, taking into account all the purposes for which wood is employed as fuel,