

asserted his dominion with unusual rigor, untempered by any milder ministry of cloud or rain. Down sunk the water in the wells, the streams shrank, and the country was parched by a continuous drouth. Fire, the usual concomitant of such a season, had been abroad in some directions, and already the flames had done some wild, unlicensed work, on rather a broad scale, in Eastern Nova Scotia. But, owing to extensive clearings in the neighborhood of their occurrence, their desolating march was stayed with little of loss or inconvenience to the inhabitants. But Miramichi, facing the waves, and backed by vast forests, had more fuel for the burning, in the most perfect state of preparation; and to her the awful baptism was about to come. The hot, sullenly brooding days succeeded each other, ripening the tinder more and more; Earth seemed meditating some unusual event; a mysterious hush was in the air, like that before the breaking of a tempest. Neighbors who met one another, panting in the road, and who, wiping their sweaty brows and looking over their scorching fields, remarked upon the heat and the doubtful crops, may have wondered what could be the issue; but never could they have predicted the devastation that really and suddenly came.

September dreamed itself out over all the hills, and went its way, as if mournfully. October, that time of freshening airs and coloring woods, succeeded; but no cool winds were there to blow away the furnace heat and smoky haze that spoke of distant fires away northward, at the District of Gaspé and the south side of the Baie de Chaleurs. That smoky pall crept over the face of New Brunswick, the contiguous provinces and the greater portion of Maine.

We look back through the dimness of seventy years to one point luridly distinct; we see the flames darting their fierce tongues above the tops of loftiest cedars and broadest pines, for that deluge of fire came typhoon-like, as wildest storms descend at sea. Yet just before the people dwelt in fancied security; they watched these monitors without serious alarm, dreaming the like had been harmlessly seen before. Why should they quake at what seemed so far away? So, in the prospect of such a disaster as had never visited the land before, they waited. Some might sigh for a breath of the genuine October, for the first day of that month had come and yet the most oppressive, unnatural heat remained, yielding only languor and prostration. Another day—it is still less tolerable! Still another—the fourth—fifth—and matters are growing worse!

Beware, O ye people! nor dream vainly of cooler airs that cannot issue from the bosom of that red-sheeted fury creeping at ye through the woods; no tawny savage, of this his native wilderness, ever so lurking, deadly and ravenous! Does not some sage head among ye shake itself, and declare what must be? This fire is a large one; unmistakably it is approaching and gathering volume over every mile of its path. "Now it wins its widening way".

What is it we begin to see? Are those not distinct

fiery gleams penetrating the forest fitfully, like an instant sword out of heaven, and as quickly withdrawn? And are not such heated breaths something more than the fervors of an autumnal sun, that we faint before them? The sixth day dawns bringing the ashen doom still nearer; there is not an inspiration that is pleasant—nothing but dead air, charged with hot vapor; while over all the predestined waste a strange, pale mist is seen to settle. This is a hopeless symptom. Ah! for a wind of God to blow, and rustle these dead leaves, and beat back the encroaching monster! but there is none. Dark like that pall over unsuspecting Pompeii, the shadow settles on Miramichi. But amid the uncertainty straining the baffled eye, what core of more sombre tint develops itself? What is glooming over the people like a voluminous cloud portentous of thunder, and the bolt that strikes we know not where? Be awakened, ye who sleep, for it is the certain harbinger of such a storm as never bellowed here; and behind it is destruction! Three o'clock has come; it seems like an afternoon in Gehenna; strange if these devoted are not yet alarmed! O what a sweet nest is earth—is home! So will it be at Dooms-day, when fond earthlings will be found so wedded to clay idols, so wrapped in cere cloth of long habit, and judgment flames will despoil them; so was it of old when the floods broke forth momentarily and swept them away.

Hark! There are sounds like the rattle of distant artillery,—dull, dread, ominous, eruptive sounds, in the distant woods, startling the sick air. Now, nearer explosions are heard. Fire is abroad everywhere; we seem suddenly encircled by it; while, as evening draws on, more awful than that over the Arabian desert, which was known for a merciful symbol, a gigantic column of smoke towers aloof towards Newcastle, in the north-west, till a slight breeze dissevers it and scatters the huge fragments away. Night comes, never with more of gloom, nor more glaringly pictured upon the sky by red-flame pencils, writing dreadfully their inscription—their *mene, mene, tekel, upharsin*.

The time has come, and with it the brief alarm. The more fearful pale before these omens; they cower but do not fly, and the story of their alarm fails to arouse the doleful multitude. Nevertheless, this night shall not go over the heads of dwellers in Miramichi scathless. The vesper hour is passed, but that which should be night looks but a lurid day. Eight o'clock,—a broader glare, nearing rapidly. Nine o'clock! and now the bright beast is all ready to spring out of the woods upon them; its dreadful conversation with falling trunks and crackling boughs, as it leaps along, is incessant and it will be here as soon as possible. Rise, O people, from your beds, if any of you slumber! And think not to save your beds or anything that is yours, but your lives, since if you save them you must be counted fortunate; your herds and homes if you succeed in saving, it will be miraculous. Ye do arise! for the awful roar of that fiery tornado is breaking on your ears; and the trampling of its feet on the earth and beating of its wings above in the heavens, is something that pale-faced husbands and mothers, with their trembling children, ask to be spared the hearing.