

## THE INTERCOLONIAL CONFERENCE.

Delegates for the colonial conference arrived at Vancouver at a time when the British Columbia floods barred the way, and they may possibly be delayed from this cause till after the opening ceremonies, which take place next Thursday. Victoria sends no less than three delegates, Hon. Sir Henry Wrixon, Hon. Samuel Frazer, and Hon. Nicholas Fraser; Queensland sends two, Hon. A. H. Thynne and Hon. E. Forrest; New South Wales and New Zealand each send one, the former, Mr. T. B. Suttor, the latter, Mr. Albert Smith. South Australia will be represented by Mr. Thomas Playford, Cape Colony by Sir Henry de Villiers, Sir Charles Mills and Mr. J. H. Hofmeyer. But not only will these colonies be represented: the Earl of Jersey will be present on behalf of the Imperial Government.

Cable and steamship communication between Canada and Australia will form the chief topics of discussion. The colonies, if they agree to grant subsidies for these objects, will be likely to press strongly for Imperial aid. It is not probable that the Earl of Jersey will be authorized to say definitely what that government will be prepared to do in the premises. Cable communication in these days goes far to supersede instructions given to the agents of governments away from the metropolis, in case of a new turn in the business under discussion. The Imperial Government may, through its representative, throw out hints which may prevent the colonies pursuing a hopeless aim, if any such should appear.

The represented colonies will be likely to act under instructions, on the rigidity or flexibility of which much may depend. The representatives of the Australian colonies will not be in a position to interchange confidences with their governments, as the intelligence would give a secret to a line whose opposition to that projected is of the most deadly character. This embarrassment, by a process of extension, may cause the delegates to feel the special need of a direct cable between Canada and Australia.

Whatever is resolved on at the conference, it will only form the initial step to the work to be undertaken. To complete any agreement between the different parties represented, the direct action of the Imperial Government will almost certainly be necessary.

Is this conference to prove the germ of new development of the united energies of those parts of the British Empire which come under the scope of its influence? Will it tend to make the colonies of to-day the allies of the Mother Country, and of themselves to-morrow? These questions are easily asked, but cannot be answered with any degree of confidence.

The social effect of the conference, whatever be the outcome, can scarcely be otherwise than good. Politically, the far apart colonies represented will become for the moment better acquainted; their commercial relations may, as a consequence of what is done, undergo a great and benefi-

cial change. The vice of small communities is the restriction of the range of vision, which is apt to be confined to the narrow space in which they exist. The broadening of the colonial view will be a distinct advantage.

If the conference be wise, it will avoid ambitious attempts to frame schemes for the reorganization of the British Empire. And, to tell the truth, there is little danger of its mooted anything of this kind. The representatives are acute politicians who know the wants of the colonies they represent, and this knowledge will become the common property of each. What will be the outcome it is scarcely safe to predict; but the chances are that the cable scheme will be strongly endorsed.

## PRAIRIE FIRES.

A subject of more than local moment has been brought to the attention of the people of Western Canada by the Moose Jaw Board of Trade. This is the destructiveness of prairie fires, which sweep the grass and hay lands. This body has memorialized the Government, and asks the co-operation of other boards of trade in the North West. We find reference to the subject in the *Regina Leader*: "Leaving out of view the losses to individuals caused by these fires—great though these losses have often been—the public losses through injury to the soil and effect on the climate of the country have been almost incalculable. In 1882, when the settlement of this part of the country began, no better country could be desired for ranching and stock raising than the southern part of Assiniboia. . . . There was abundance of water and wood, and over a large part of it there were from six to ten feet of vegetable mould covering the sand and gravel sub-soil, on which grew the most nutritious grasses that could anywhere be found. The annually recurring prairie fires have burned off the small timber that was then growing, besides injuring to a greater or less extent the vegetable constituents of the soil. Individual sloughs in which there then grew annually from one to two thousand tons of the best hay, have now no soil left to grow anything but a few scattered weeds. Then among the injuries to the climate arising from these fires and the consequent drying up of the prairie, is their tendency to cause drought."

On last Sunday afternoon, says the *Leader* of June 7th, an extensive prairie fire burned over a large tract of land in the vicinity of Grand Coulee, and destroyed a great amount of herbage. There was enough of last year's dead grass to feed the fire, while withering and destroying the growth of this year. And a rancher from Willow Bunch stated in May that in the locality named the greatest enemy against which the settlers and ranchers had to contend was the prairie fire, and it was doing more to retard settlement and deplete the natural wealth of the country than all other causes combined.

Now, as to the cause of these fires. Our contemporary says it has been customary to lay the chief blame on the Canadian Pacific Railway engines. Many are how-

ever caused by the carelessness of settlers and travellers, and others are deliberately set out by persons who do not realize the injury caused by them. "Many remedies have been suggested and tried, but as yet none have proved successful, nor will they until all railway companies operating railways in the North-West Territories are compelled by law to fireguard their lines and to look more carefully after the wire netting of the smokestacks of their engines. Besides this, the ordinance regarding prairie fires must be more rigidly enforced and offenders more surely brought to justice." The subject is one meriting attention from all concerned, and we trust that the awakening that the Moose Jaw board has sought to cause will have effect in the proper quarter.

## HEMLOCK LUMBER.

So abundant has pine wood been in Canada, and so accustomed have we Canadians become to using the smooth-grained, delicately-colored wood for a great variety of purposes, that we have treated with disproportionate neglect, not to say contempt, minor woods. This journal has frequently urged the claims of hemlock to recognition as a valuable wood, combining the qualities of strength and durability with comparative lightness. And it was long since pointed out in our columns that Pennsylvania hemlock was coming into use in the United States as a substitute for pine in billstuff for cheaper jo's.

We now learn with interest, therefore, from the *Fredericton Gleaner*, that Mr. Alexander Gibson, the distinguished lumberman of New Brunswick, has been urging the dwellers on the Miramichi river to some purpose with respect to the utilization of this wood, which is so plentiful in their forests. The paper mentioned says: "Mr. Elisha Gilpatrick and other American gentlemen purpose erecting a large mill somewhere along the line of the Canada Eastern Railway. In this mill it is proposed to make use of hemlock logs. These logs will be sawn into boards, the boards will then be planed and dried, and shipped by rail to the United States market. The drying process will occupy about six weeks, and after they have been dried for that length of time the weight will be much less, and the expense of shipping will decrease accordingly. The capacity of the mill will be about 4,000,000 feet per year. The undertaking is under the auspices of Mr. Alex. Gibson, the lumber king of the Nashwaak." It is thus evident that if our own people have overlooked the claims of hemlock trees, and have forgotten that pine, at the present rate of consumption, cannot last for ever, other people beyond our borders have been neither forgetful nor careless.

## MONTREAL TRADE FIGURES.

There has been a decided decrease in the aggregate imports at Montreal for May, which shows that the decline in foreign purchases referred to at the Bank of Montreal meeting as characterizing the months up to close of April, has been continued into the succeeding month. The