

Communication. PRAIRIE FIRES.

To the Editor of the Commercial.

SIR—Your endeavors, added to the action taken by the Winnipeg Board of Trade, have been so successful in the matter of getting the Southwestern Manitoba mail service improved, that I venture to address you on the very serious subject of prairie and bush fires.

I trust that it is the intention of the Government to take the matter up, but if not the public should not let the question rest until something practical and effective is introduced; the Government doubtless might say, and the statement would be true, that an excellent law for the prevention of fires is already on the Statute Book; unfortunately I have no copy of the prairie fire law to refer to, but from all I can learn the enactment is good, excepting for the fatal flaw regarding the way in which it is expected to be carried out; this flaw is so serious as to be entirely fatal to any chance of success, in effectiveness it might otherwise possess; so far as I can learn there have been scores of cases in which the law should have been put in force, but I cannot learn of a single instance throughout Southern Manitoba, in which an offender has been prosecuted; it is the old proverb over again, "what is everybody's business, is nobody's business," and besides this fire prevention law requires that a man should go and inform against his neighbors I trust there are very few that would care to be "informers," and consequently so long as the execution of law is left to the chance of an "informant" turning up, the probabilities are that it will remain a dead letter.

I have seen lately two practical suggestions for the prevention or rather mitigation of these fires; both are excellent, but I fear impracticable; the first is from Mr. Keith Turner. That gentleman suggests a number of fire guardians at a good salary. The country cannot afford this; besides if a number of men are appointed they are sure in their zeal, to get at loggerheads with the farmers, and no steps can possibly be successful unless the farmers themselves are favorable to agree with and help in the arrangement; the second plan I have observed is that from Sheriff Inkster, and it also is excellent, but much of it is unfortunately impracticable. I need only instance my own place; all the municipalities and settlers of Manitoba and this Northwest combined could not have stopped the fire that swept over my land a month ago, and kept us anxiously fighting with it night and day, here, and in the neighborhood, for over a week. There is a moral certainly that this fire was wilfully set going only a short distance outside my land, and if there had been a public officer entrusted with the duty of taking up such cases, the offender would, I think, have been brought to justice before now. I go farther and say that if there had been such an official, the probabilities are that this most serious fire, (it has swept over millions of acres and done incalculable damage) would never have been lighted. The country has got special "game guardians and timber inspectors," but these combined are nothing in comparison to the importance of these much needed "fire guardians."

Each municipality should have a "fire guardian" and the appointment might be combined

with that of "game guardian," the remuneration he should receive is best determined by the Government and the municipality concerned, only it should be remembered that the better they can pay a man within reason the better the quality of officer they are likely to get. His duty would be to see the prevention-of-fire laws strictly enforced, and also to take up and prosecute all cases which called for legal action. No right minded farmer would withhold his evidence or assistance in this way, as there could be no stigma or "informant" attached to such proceedings.

It is probable that the law would need extending to make these arrangements effective and applicable, for instance each municipality should be required to grade out all its roads; these would act as the main fire breaks through the different townships. Then each farmer should be required to make breaks round his house, barns, stables, granaries, hay and straw stacks, etc.; these breaks should be made by plowing double rings around each place, or stack, each plowing to be at least, say ten feet wide, with twenty feet between, and the space between the plowings to be burned. Each settler should be compelled by law to annually renew these breaks, and the municipalities should likewise be compelled to see that their man breaks are also annually put in order. It is a question if the law should not be so framed as to insist that each settler (under penalties for non compliance) should be compelled within a certain date each year, to send a certificate to the Reeve and Council, signed by the "fire guardian," that he had fully complied with the law. The way in which the space between the plowed breaks should be burned, should be properly defined by law, in fact the whole arrangement should be clear and concise, and each settler should be annually provided a copy, together with the name and address of his "fire guardian," not later than the 1st of July of each year.

This sketch is necessarily incomplete and very crude, but if the Government will take the opinions of the municipalities, and assist the latter so far as lies in their power, I think that these prairie fires may be most materially lessened, and the damage done by them be brought down to a low minimum, though nothing but the gradual filling up of the country can possibly altogether stop them. If officers are appointed as sketched above they should have no duties that can possibly take them away from the districts to which they are appointed.

This question is one that very seriously affects either directly or indirectly, every individual in the country. Every resident in Winnipeg is affected by it, and it behoves every one to support some well-concerted measure to grapple with this most serious annual evil.

I hope that the Board of Trade may give their powerful support and aid towards getting some effectual measure introduced without delay: if nothing is done the fires will go on, and get more serious each season, as both careless and evil minded people will continue to set fire to the prairie so long as they know that they are not likely to incur any personal risk by so doing. For instance, if nothing is done the man who is credited with setting the fire going in this locality last month, is sure to do it again next year.

Maringhurst, Man.
November 30th, 1886.

W. WALTON.

British Columbia.

The European Hotel has been opened at Vancouver.

The Vancouver Advertiser has resumed publication.

The Vancouver Daily News has been considerably enlarged.

Van Horne's brick and stone block, to be built at Vancouver, will cost \$45,000.

The collections of customs at Victoria last month were: Duties, \$68,372.17. Miscellaneous, \$1271.96, Chinese Act, \$368.50 Total, \$70,012.63.

The ship Pacific Slope has arrived at Port Moody with a cargo of Australian coal in ballast. She will subsequently proceed to Moodyville Saw Mill to load lumber.

The ship Carrie Delap, with a cargo consisting of 813 tons of tea from Kiobe, Yokohama arrived in Royal Roads on Nov 2nd having made the voyage in 40 days. She proceeded to Port Moody to discharge her cargo.

It is stated that the Canadian Pacific Railway have purchased the telegraph line of the Esquimalt & Nainano Railway Co., giving the latter company the right to run a wire for private convenience on the poles already erected.

Arrangements have been affected between the Shuswap and Okanagan railway company, and Larkin, Connolly, & Patterson, the well known contractors, whereby the latter will survey the line and prepare estimates as a preliminary towards construction.

A by-law has been adopted by public vote at Vancouver, to appropriate \$22,000 for public improvements. The amount will be expended in purchasing a steam fire engine; the erection of fire hall and construction of water tank; erecting a city hall and lock-up, and laying out a cemetery and street improvements.

General Notes.

Paris, Ont., is to have a needle factory.

A meat packing establishment will be started in Montreal, by a company with \$500,000 capital.

A sale of between 20,000 and 25,000 boxes of Wisconsin cheese was made in Chicago recently at 9c to 10c per pound. The cheese was July make, held in cold storage.

The first shipments of Canadian honey have recently been made to Liverpool, put up in 10 pound and 60 pound cans. There is a large and growing consumption of this article in Great Britain.

The Ontario Car Works, at London, Ontario, have received another contract from the C.P.R. for 100 flat cars. The company has just finished a large consignment of passenger cars for the Manitoba & Northwestern Railway. It employs now some 200 hands.

The railway mileage in the United States exceeds that of the whole of Europe, and is greater by two-fifths than that of the whole world. While at the beginning of 1865 there were only 34,000 miles of railway in operation in the United States, there are at present 130,000 miles.

The flour and meal examiners met at Montreal last week to select standards for the coming year. They resolved to recommend that the inspection act be so amended as to allow roller flour to be graded and that the grades be Patent Winter Wheat, Spring Wheat, Patent and Straight Roller. It was also resolved to ask the Government to make the designations of the different qualities of flour, Patent Winter Wheat, Patent Spring Wheat, Straight Roller, Strong Baker's, and Extra Superfine.