

FIRES IN OUR PINE FOREST.

10,000,000 WORTH OR MORE OF PINE DESTROYED THIS YEAR IN ONTARIO.

Not for many years has fire made such havoc among the pine forests of the country. The extent of these fires is, however, not known, and cannot be approximately ascertained until the agents and bush rangers in the employ of the Ontario Government make reports upon the subject. It is known that thousands of square miles of territory have been burned over along the Ottawa, in the back townships north of Lake Ontario, and through Muskoka and Parry Sound. Much of this burnt land has consisted of farms, woods from which the pine has been stripped, and pine areas previously destroyed by fire.

THE LOSS BY LAST SEASON'S FIRES.

Of the very great destruction which must have occurred throughout the whole unsettled territory lying along the eastern borders of Parry Sound and Muskoka, and thence eastward to the townships along the Ottawa, little or nothing is known. Estimate has been made of the loss in the Ottawa Valley, and it is placed by some at \$5,000,000. In Muskoka, and Parry Sound great belts, twenty miles or more in length, and from one mile to five or six miles wide, have been burned over; and according to one gentleman, well acquainted with the districts, the smoke of bush fires has ascended from almost every square mile of territory from Lake Nipissing to the Severn. The magnitude of the loss must therefore have been great, and not improbably quite equal to that along the Ottawa. Yet some almost place it as low as one million dollars. That figure may not be too small on the lowest calculation of the value of the uncut trees to the lumbering companies. But the actual value may be four or five times as much. Along the north shore of Lake Huron the damage from fire has not been so great as it was supposed to be during the prevalence of the fires, but this may apply only to the narrow strip of territory traversed in summer by lumbermen and others. The total loss over the whole Province may be variously estimated at from ten to fifteen million dollars.

CUTTING DEAD TREES.

Much may yet be saved by prompt cutting of the scorched timber, and most of the trees in the burned districts are merely scorched. If these trees be cut down this winter the borer, which invariably attacks dead trees in the summer season, can do no harm, and they will be suitable for lumber, but otherwise the timber will be rendered useless. The cutting of these trees, situated in many instances where access and removal are difficult, can not be expected, so that nearly every one of the few hundred thousand pine trees burned, more or less, last summer, may be considered a total loss.

THE ANNUAL LOSS BY FIRE.

The average annual loss by fire cannot well be estimated even approximately, and if one million dollars be roughly stated as an amount more probable than anything lower, the figures large as they are, can scarcely be considered too high. The surveys of the new townships of Bonfield and Boulton, of which notice has been taken in the *Globe*, reveal an aspect of the forest lands which is common almost everywhere from the Georgian Bay to the Ottawa. Two-thirds of Bonfield has been burned over at one time and another within recent years, while Boulton has suffered from the sweeping away of one-third of its forest. The same story is told of all other parts of the pine country by the surveyors who have traversed them. Much of this destruction has been done where the lumberman and the trapper were, till recently, the only human beings who traversed the wilds. When the pioneer settler entered the danger increased, and the pine has only an even chance of survival till the lumbermen can turn it to commercial account.

EXTINCTION OF THE LUMBER TRADE THREATENED.

Settlements have now been formed in most parts of the pine country, and for twenty years at the present rate of progress there will scarcely be the area of a township left unpenetrated by the hardy pioneer. Twenty years later the lumber business may be a thing of the past, so far as Ontario is concerned, unless an efficient system be adopted of protecting the forests. Already only the limited tract along the west

side of the Ottawa from Mattawan to Lake Temiscamingue, the wilderness, rapidly diminishing in area, that lies between the county of Peterborough and Lake Nipissing, and a portion of the north shore district are yet unbroken by settlement. Half, perhaps much less than half, of the area contains no pine of commercial value; so that under the present system of waste, not only may an important source of Government revenue be greatly diminished within a decade or two, but one of the leading industries of the country will be crippled in its competition with districts more favoured by abundance and easy access. The replanting of trees can do little to remedy the mischief, as one hundred and fifty years are required, so it is said, for a pine to reach maturity. That length of time being necessary to produce good marketable timber, it will be seen, if viewed in connection with the progress of settlement and the increasing demand for lumber, that less than one per cent. of our forest trees can be allowed to be cut down or burned if the province hopes to preserve a permanent lumber industry and a Government revenue therefrom.

PROTECTION AGAINST FIRE.

In 1878 the Ontario Legislature introduced better regulations than theretofore had been in use for the prevention of forest fires. The fire district of Ontario, as constituted by the Act, includes a large area; the boundary in the southern part extends from Bruce Mines along the north shore and the Georgian Bay to Midland, then across Lake Couchiching to thirty miles north of Kingston, where it turns northward to Allumette Island, and follows the course of the Ottawa to Lake Temiscamingue. In this district fires are placed under considerable legal restriction. No fire is to be kindled in or within half a mile from the woods, between the 1st of April and 1st of November, except for clearing land, cooking, obtaining warmth, or some industrial purpose. In building any such fires a locality is to be selected where there is the smallest quantity of vegetable matter, dead wood, branches, brushwood, dry leaves, or resinous trees. The place where the fire is to be lighted is then to be cleared of all dead vegetation for a space of ten feet around, and every care is to be taken to prevent the fire from spreading, and it must be extinguished by the parties kindling it before they leave the spot. The pains and penalties of the Act lie on the head and pocket of him who throws or drops a burning match, the ashes, of a pipe or a lighted cigar in this sixty thousand-square-mile tinder-box. The wadding of a firearm must also be looked after or the law will pounce down on the neglectful sportsman.

CAMPING PARTIES.

One section of the Act bears severely on some of the parties who leave Toronto and other towns for an outing near the northern waters. Whether such parties consist of one or more persons they must have a recognized head, if for no other purpose than the purposes of this Act. Such head must carry a copy of the Act with him among his other baggage, and once a week must call his men together and read the Act aloud in their hearing, and also explain it to them. If a man go out alone, it is presumed that he will call himself together and read the Act aloud—a wise provision of the law for the evolution of lawyers, clergymen and stump orators. It would be interesting to know how many pleasure parties have observed this section and escaped liability to the penalty of \$50 and costs, or three months in gaol imposed for its violation.

An important section refers to the locomotive engines passing through the fire district. Such engines must have all the most approved and efficient means of preventing the escape of fire from the furnace or ash-pan, and the smoke stack is to be provided with a bonnet or screen of iron or steel wire netting, containing in each square inch eleven wires each way at right angles to each other. The duty of seeing that these appliances are used is especially given to the driver of the locomotive. The penalty for contravention of the Act is fifty dollars and costs of prosecution, and in the case of railway companies one hundred dollars and costs for each offence; this latter penalty to be recovered by suit in any court of competent jurisdiction. Every suit for recovery of a penalty must be

commenced within three months after the contravention complained of.

THE LAW A DEAD LETTER.

As every one acquainted with the forest territory knows, this Act is almost a dead letter. The reason is that practically no one is responsible for its enforcement. Successful prosecution of a suit entitles the complainant or prosecutor to one-half of the fine and costs, and while any person can appear as prosecutor, the duty is said to attach especially to Crown Land Agents, Woods and Forest Agents, Free Grant Agents, and bush-rangers. These men are unlikely to incur the odium of instituting a prosecution which may bring them a direct pecuniary benefit. The same thing has been tried in the liquor law and found wanting. The difficulty is increased by another cause. In these sparsely settled districts it is not easy to discover the offender in one case out of a dozen, for the Government agents are not numerous, while the bush-rangers, whose duties are the measurement of the ties cut by the lumberers, necessarily do their work in the winter, and in summer attend to private business.

A MORE EFFICIENT LAW REQUIRED.

The remedy may partly lie in investing Crown Land or Free Grant agents with power on dry seasons to prohibit the kindling of clearing fires, and at all times in the summer months to require every party about to start a fire to first obtain written permission. Bush rangers should be more numerous, and their special duty in summer should be to constantly scour their districts in search of fires. In this way every party camping out would be known to the rangers, and it would be comparatively easy to fix any contravention of the Act on the right parties.

The regulation regarding locomotives might be made to apply throughout the whole Province, for the past season's record shows that some of the most destructive fires occurred beyond the fire district, and were caused by sparks from passing engines.

The hope is expressed that the Government will instruct its agents to make full reports of the extent of the damage done by fires during the past season, and the causes, as far as can be ascertained, of each fire.—*Globe*.

THE GREAT FOREST FIRE.

A DISTRESSING TALE FROM THE BURNT MICHIGAN DISTRICT BY A FORMER PETERBOROUGH MAN.

The following letter appeared in the *Peterborough Review*—

DEAR SIR,—Having received a number of communications from old friends from Peterborough and other localities since the fire of September 5th, in regard to our welfare and the particulars in regard to the fire, and as the impression is quite general that we were burned up, allow me through the columns of your paper to state that such is not the case. Myself and family were all burnt more or less, but thanks to the Great Ruler of the Universe, our lives were saved, while others all around us perished in the flames, every thing that we had was consumed, not one dollar worth was saved except what we had on our persons and even that was torn from our backs to save us from burning. We sought refuge in a corn-field and remained there from 1 until 6 o'clock p.m., with the air so heated and the smoke so dense that breathing was very difficult. Our only relief was lying with our faces on the ground and covering ourselves with the grain stalks. Let me here state that there are hundreds of people in the burned district to-day that are losing their hair by reason of the extreme heat. At times it was as dark as night, and the darkness was the cause of many deaths, as the people could not see the way to escape from the flames. The fire reached my place about 1 o'clock, and was one broad extended sheet of flame as far as the eye could reach, and as it was blowing a gale at the time, it travelled a distance of twenty miles in less than one hour and swept everything before it, leaving death and destitution in its wake. There were thousands of acres of land upon which it did not leave a living thing of any kind, not even one splint of grass. Mr. editor, could you have travelled over that space of ground on the following day, you would have witnessed some of the most heartrending scenes that it is possible for the eye to behold. Whole families clustered together, some burned to a cinder and

others partially burned, writhing and groaning in their agony, crying and begging for relief, when death alone was the only relief possible for them. Such my friends were some of the scenes witnessed by those that were so fortunate as to save their lives, and which has left an impression upon their minds that time will never efface. As regards our present welfare I may say that we have "thanks to the good people of our land" enough to eat and clothes enough to wear at present. The great trouble will be to get food for our horses, as there is not any in the country and it will have to be shipped from a distance and in all probability many will perish for want of it. By inserting the above you will confer a great favor.

I remain yours &c.

HENRY LAWSON.

Bad Axe, Michigan, Nov. 7th, 1881.

THE FORESTRY WORK OF THE TENTH CENSUS.

Up to the present time there has been but a vague conception of the extent and value of one of the most important sources of the prosperity of the United States. It seems the more strange when it is considered that this great item in the nation's assets is not buried in the earth, like its mineral wealth, but stands proudly on the surface, like a mighty host, seen of all men. The entire welfare of a country is more identified with the forests that cover it than with any other feature of the earth's surface. The trees are the kindest friends of the soil; they are the guardians of its fertility; they protect the fields from devastating floods, and cherish the springs that feed the streams. Without them the land becomes an arid desert, and its people are debased to barbarism and poverty. Great desolated tracts in Asia, Africa and along the eastern Mediterranean were once blooming and garden like, but when the trees were cut away the dryads avenged themselves. Therefore it is fitting that in the grand taking account of stock in the national storehouse that occurs every decade, the forest wealth of the country should at last be accorded its proper place.

Although the statistics concerning the forests of most of the European countries are generally full and accurate, the institution of the forestry division of the 10th census of the United States forms the first attempt to obtain such information by means of the census work of any country. In laying out the work of his bureau, Gen. Francis A. Walker, the superintendent of the census, decided to undertake an investigation into the extent of the forest covering of the country as related to agriculture; into the forest wealth as related to manufacture, to railway transportation, and to the domestic supply of fuel; and into the operations of the lumbering industry as pursued in the principal districts of cutting and export. The scope of the investigation comprises the chief characteristics of the forest flora of each section of the country, an account of the various woods in the adaptation to industrial and domestic uses, and the methods in vogue in the various parts of the country for the protection or restoration of the forest growth.—*Sylvester Baxter in November Atlantic*.

A Long Trestle.

The *Chattanooga Times* says:—Fletcher Wessenberg & Co. have been awarded the contract for building a trestle across Lake Pontchartrain and approaches. The trestle will be twenty-five miles long, and the contractors bind themselves to finish it in one year.

The contract is the largest timber contract ever before awarded in the south. It will amount to at least 1,250,000. Thirty million feet of lumber and seventy-five car loads of bolt, 1,500,000 pounds will be used in building this trestle. All timbers which will go in water will be creosoted; creosote works will be erected at once near the lake at a cost of \$75,000.

The works are on the line of the New Orleans and North-Eastern railway, the extension of the Vicksburg and Meridian railway to New Orleans. The rest of the work is now under contract, as well as the road from Monroe to Shreveport, and is to be finished within a year, at which time the Erlanger system, extending from Cincinnati to Shreveport and New Orleans will be intact.