

WASTING OUR BLESSINGS.

THE people of the present day are working far more to the disadvantage of future generations than if they were piling up a mountain of mere pecuniary indebtedness to be paid by those who shall come after us. Money can be earned with comparative ease when material is abundant and the forces of nature can be harnessed up like docile beasts to do our bidding; but when the new material is absent productive labour is difficult, if not impossible. The prodigal waste of our supplies of natural gas, oil, coal, and iron may well suggest the questions: Are we not wickedly dissipating what should of right be enjoyed by future generations? and What would be our condition to-day if the people of a century or two ago had been as wasteful of these resources as we are now? It is stated that in some parts of Western Pennsylvania the street lamps are allowed to burn all day because the supply of natural gas is cheaper than the labour needed to light and extinguish the lamps each twenty-four hours. In Indiana many of the natural gas wells are wantonly set on fire for the sake of display of huge volumes of flame, involving the consumption of an enormous amount of fuel that ought to be utilized now or saved up for years to come. Some of the Russian wells in Baku are allowed to burn out in the same way. The coal and iron mines of Great Britain have been drawn upon so lavishly in the last few years that the cost of producing the latter is daily growing, and the former is made the subject of computations which point to the exhaustion of the supply within a small number of years, and in a few decades from this will render its mining unprofitable because of the great depths from which it will

have to be brought to the surface. The process has not been carried so far in the United States. As yet we have not exhausted the bulk of the immense deposits of both coal and iron which it took Nature millions of years to deposit near the surface for our use. We have, however, already exhausted the larger part of our timber supply, and perhaps worked an injurious change of climate thereby, acting in small degree on the ruinous policy, or absence of one, which has made mere treeless wastes areas which were once the seat of mighty empires in Western Asia. Civilized man is wasting recklessly and wickedly the good gifts of Providence, and at a rate which threatens to bring round in another quarter of a century conditions widely different from those of to-day, unless the waste be checked. By that time probably we shall have not a single unexhausted pocket of natural gas, a very scanty supply of petroleum, comparatively little timber, and possibly a poorer climate as a consequence of the latter. By that time the English mines will have been worked down to near the unprofitable limit, and those in the western part of the European continent be much nearer the point of exhaustion than now. Fifty years hence the New World may prove to be the most important source of supply for coal and iron to the Old, and in the course of a second half-century our own deposits of coal and iron may have been drawn upon so extensively by the widening demand as to raise still other questions than those broached at the head of this article. It may then be considered desirable to ask if there be not some other available source of artificial heat besides the combustion of coal, and some other metal which can be