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GOSSIP

HISTORIC FOREST FIRES

The terrible work of the flames, which have burned over and destroyed hundreds of thousands of acres of timber and property to the value of millions, recalls to memory other great forest fires which have attained historic importance.

One of the earliest of these was the great Miramichi fire of 1825. It began its greatest destruction about one o'clock in the afternoon of October 7 of that year, at a place about 60 miles above the town of Newcastle, on the Miramichi River, in New Brunswick. Before 10 o'clock at night it was 20 miles below Newcastle. In nine hours it had destroyed a belt of forest 80 miles long and 25 miles wide. Over more than two and a half million acres almost every living thing was killed. Even the fish were afterwards found dead in heaps on the river banks. Five hundred and ninety buildings were burned, and a number of towns, including Newcastle, Chatham and Douglstown, were destroyed. One hundred and sixty persons perished, and nearly a thousand head of stock. The loss from the Miramichi fire is estimated at \$300,000, not including the value of the timber.

In the majority of such forest fires as this the destruction of the timber is a more serious loss by far than that of the cattle and buildings, for it carries with it the impoverishment of a whole region for tens or even hundreds of years afterwards. The loss of the stumpage value of the timber at the time of the fire is but a small part of the damage to the neighborhood. The wages that would have been earned in lumbering, added to the value of the produce that would have been purchased to supply the lumber camps, and the taxes that would have been devoted to roads and other public improvements, furnish a much truer measure of how much, sooner or later, it costs a region when its forests are destroyed by fire.

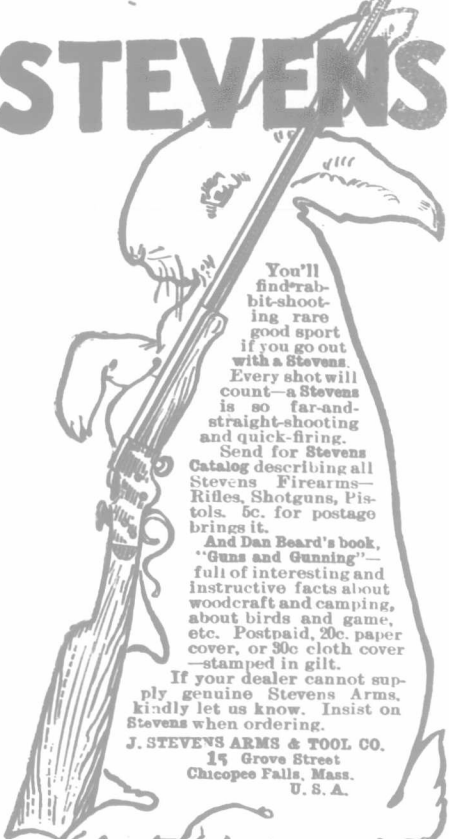
The Peshtigo fire of October, 1871, was still more severe than the Miramichi. It covered an area of more than 2,000 square miles in Wisconsin, and involved a loss in timber and other property of many millions of dollars. Between 1,200 and 1,500 persons perished, including nearly half the population of Peshtigo, at that time a town of 2,000 inhabitants. Other fires of about the same time were most destructive in Michigan. A strip about 40 miles wide and 180 miles long, extending across the central part of the state, from Lake Michigan to Lake Huron, was devastated. The estimated loss in timber was about 4,000,000,000 feet board measure, and in money over \$10,000,000. Several hundred persons perished.

In the early part of September, 1881, great fires covered more than 1,800 square miles in various parts of Michigan. The estimated loss in property, in addition to many hundred thousand acres of valuable timber, was more than \$2,300,000. Over 5,000 persons were made destitute, and the number of lives lost is variously estimated at from 150 to 500.

The most destructive fire of more recent years was that which started near Hinckley, Minn., September, 1, 1894. While the area burned over was less than in some other great fires, the loss of life and property was very heavy. Hinckley and six other towns were destroyed, about 500 lives were lost, more than 2,000 persons were left destitute and the estimated loss of property of various kinds was \$25,000,000. Except for the heroic conduct of locomotive engineers and other railroad men the loss of life would have been much greater.

This fire was all the more deplorable, because it was wholly unnecessary. For many days before the high wind came and drove it into Hinckley, the town of Hinckley, and could have been put out.

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