

SHARP PRACTICE.

As we published the sensational account of the asserted timber discoveries by Mr. W. Mercer, C.E., we now give the other side of the story. The Northwestern Lumberman says:-

It is not uncommon for scheming to pay. In fact it often pays better than business that is conducted openly, as is proved by every day transactions, and it is not unlikely that a piece of very adroit business that has for some time been going on in pine land circles has rewarded the man who was conducting it very handsomely.

About a month ago, as the readers of the Lumberman will remember, we published the statement of Mr. William Mercer, a civil engineer, of Bay City, Mich., who had recently returned from the Spanish River district, Ontario, to the effect that he had discovered in that region a genuine lumberman's paradise. There were seas of pine, stretching beyond any government surveys even, and, according to the stories of the Indians, hundreds of miles beyond them.

While we hoped that the story might prove true, we could not swallow it without a grain of allowance. Experience has educated us up to that point that we look with suspicion upon any report of an immense timber find. To ascertain about the timber supply of the country it is not necessary to go up in a balloon, or down into the bowels of the earth. It is easily enough gotten at by a man sufficiently interested to be at the pains. There are a great many men in this country with plenty of money in their pockets, and who understand all the conditions governing timber as regarding its value for lumber, who have hunted timbered land, particularly pine lands, pretty thoroughly. We have no much faith in their knowledge of the situation that when we hear a report of a prodigious discovery of pine, right at home, we suspect at once that there is a Munchausen element in it, a suspicion that, in these late days, has never proved unfounded.

Mr. Mercer gained the ears of some gullible newspaper men of this city, and a statement of the big find was given to the world. This, on the face of it, had a bad look. It is natural enough for a man who has made a great discovery to let it be known through the press, providing it would not be more profitable to keep it to himself; and the influence of the press is often the first thing desired by a person who has a scheme on hand. It helps him wonderfully, if he succeeds in gaining it.

Mr. Mercer is an old-time lumberman, and has a host of friends among the craft in Michigan. Those friends well know that the pine of their own state is rapidly disappearing. They were born and bred to the business of lumbering, and know no other. It seems a trifle out of the natural run of things that the Canadian explorer, instead of informing his friends of his valuable discovery, should come to Chicago and disclose it to newspaper men, when he knew all the time that they would go right off and tell of it. We wondered at the time that he did not whisper it in the ears of his friends who could profit by it. The region was the richest in pine the gentleman had ever seen, although he was conversant with the trees of the cork variety that once grow on Cass river, and yielded a fabulous per cent. of uppers. This pine could be bought cheap; no doubt of that. It belonged to the Ontario Government, the Government did not even know of its existence, and an individual or government that is not willing to sell cheap what it does not know it has, is a poor financier. This is one of the phases of the great pine find that begat suspicion.

It was somewhat strange that the Provincial Government had no knowledge of such Cress-like possessions, but we excused it on the ground that so many of its young men migrate to the United States that there are not enough active men—such as can stand a tramp through the forests—left behind to find out what there really is in their country, covering the vast territory that it does.

We went to work, however, and it did not take a great amount of it to learn that the Ontario Government knew more than Mr. Mercer gave it credit for knowing. It had run its surveys around promiscuously in the great pine country. Possibly there was a strip of land

from 50 to 100 miles long from east to west, and very narrow, upon which the stakes of the surveyors had not been driven. The unsurveyed country is not more extensive than that indicated above, and the chances are against such dimensions. Then, again, somewhere away up in the unknown region, there is a settlement, and even a saw mill. The Indians had probably lied to Mr. Mercer.

Unless a leak is stopped it usually increases. This one grew larger and larger all the time. Every day, almost, brought evidence that Mr. Mercer, either knowingly or unknowingly, in giving a report of his discovery to the press, had favored the interests of parties who had laid to sell in the Laurentian region. If he did not know it, it is likely to prove a happy stroke of luck to the men who owned the land.

It has transpired that a good while before Mr. Mercer discovered the bourns from whence no lumberman would ever wish to return, on account of the fine pine everywhere abundant, it was discovered by somebody else. Mr. George N. Fletcher and other parties, of Alpena, Mich., discovered it a year ago, and doubtless other parties discovered it several years before they did. At any rate somebody owned a half dozen or so limits up there, and wanted to sell them. The Alpena parties purchased them at a cost of something like \$21,000. We do not assert that these limits were on the ground talked about by Mr. Mercer; but if there should happen to be, right adjoining those limits, other territory rich in the material of which lumber is made, those same limits might be more valuable than they would otherwise be. That is natural enough. A mine right by the Comstock lode would sell for more than though it were located in the Alleghenies. That is a business principle.

It furthermore seems that the Alpena gentlemen, for some reason, got sick of their bargain. In common parlance they had got "stuck." To start with, as it will be seen further on, they paid a pretty good price for their limits. We do not know what they intended to do with the timber upon their purchase, but as they own large mills at Alpena, it is supposable that they expected to float the logs home, and saw them there. They ought to have known it before, but come to think of it, they would be required to pay seventy five cents per thousand, crown land dues, and this assessment, it is plain, would be an addition worth mentioning, to the original outlay.

A craze for buying Canadian forests must have struck that portion of Michigan, for other Alpena lumbermen got a scent in the same direction. One gentleman contracted for some limits over there that were guaranteed to produce 150,000,000 feet, running 15 per cent. to uppers. It was denominated a fine chance to do a lumber business, but on looking the ground over he found 10,000,000 or 12,000,000, instead of 150,000,000, and a country full of ranges of rocky, steep hills and lakes. As it would cost more to get the timber out than it was worth, he sensibly declared the contract off.

It might have been owing to some such reason that his neighboring lumbermen found out that they had bought a cat in a sack. Mr. Mercer asserts that the country is well adapted to lumbering, and the Spanish river a good driving stream, but in this respect maybe the Indians had lied to him again. However, it was for some reason that the owners of the limits desired to sell them, for they approached Mr. A. N. Spratt on the subject. Mr. Spratt is a shrewd pine land operator, and, of course, refused to take the bonanza upon hearsay, but said he would investigate, so last summer he made a trip to the unknown region, and discovered it again. He ascertained that the Spanish river region is a poor one to carry on logging operations in, as the country rises to high elevations as you go back, giving to the streams, of course, numerous heavy falls. This examination led Mr. Spratt to refuse to buy the white elephant that was on the hands of the Alpena lumbermen at any price. Nothing daunted, another effort was made. Judge Tuttle, of Alpena, and Mr. Croyer Davison, of Harrisville, were applied to, to make the sale of the limits, with a strong probability of being successful, as, at time of writing, negotiations are being made with New York parties, the consideration being \$100,000.

It is for the New York parties to rise and ex-

plain, providing they have a mind to, what they know about these limits. Of all men in the world, eastern men are the ones that land sharpers like best to get a hold of. A great many eastern men have money, and are on the alert to profitably invest it. To many of them pine land is pine land, which ends their knowledge of the subject. We are ready to wager a very small sum that these New York gentlemen know no more about the lands they propose to buy, if they have not already bought them, than an infant knows about the north pole. We make this statement, for it seems reasonable to us that if their knowledge was very extensive in that direction they would give more not to own the limits in that district than to own them. But if they have staked in this regard they have company, and that is a consolation often. Not long since a land shark entered what he called pine lands, in the Lake Superior district, without having seen them, and immediately sold them to New York gentlemen, without their having set eye or foot upon them, so as to double his money. They will learn, if they have not already done so, that their "pine lands," purchased as an investment, could not be given to a practical lumberman in the Superior district.

In looking up the facts connected with Gulliver Mercer's great discovery, we learned that a Chicago pine land operator had been bit by the same shark. The trap was intended this time to be sprung by Toronto men. They had discovered the unknown country, and had limits in it to sell. They represented them as rich beyond description, and when the Chicago men had obtained their price, and the estimated production, he figured up that the timber would represent fourteen cents per thousand feet. Such a rare chance could not be overlooked. It was veritably "a soft snap," and at an expense of \$1,000, or thereabouts, experts were sent to the Spanish River district to investigate. The result, in the light of present events, is very amusing, and it may be proportionately profitable to people who are contemplating making their fortunes in the lumber business on the much talked of river.

The trip was made up the river in a light draft steamer, drawing from three to four feet of water. Canoes were then resorted to, and in the first three days only fourteen falls, from twenty to eighty feet high, had to be got around. It was a perilous attempt, and could not have been accomplished except that the exploring party had professional guides. There is some pine above the falls, and some years ago a daring spirit discovered the country and cut a lot of logs up there. There was no way to get them down but by water, and he set them afloat. They ran over one fall after another, but the strain was more than they could bear, and when the owner last saw them they were literally smashed up. Some were made brooms of, and the others were broken in two. To this day when a bluish mist surrounds the hills away up the Spanish River, it is believed it is due to an oath, that has just taken shape, ejected by the foolish lumberman.

Before starting, the guides told this pine land hunting party that their efforts would avail them naught, for there was no pine to speak of on the river, but the party, believing that the guides had been hired to tell such a story, went on their way, and found—pine, in limited quantities, but it must be, if it ever goes anywhere, to Hudson Bay. The same party also met the Canada Pacific railroad surveyors, also spoken of by Mr. Mercer, who gave the discouraging information that nowhere along the line of the projected route there pine in great quantities. The experts were glad to return alive, and, used to conclude, it as they are, pronounce it the most dangerous trip they had ever undertaken. There are Grand Rapids, Mich., land-holder who can give similar testimony, if needs be.

The Bay City, Mich. paper we learn that one of the Alpena owners of the limits, of which we have been writing, called at the office of that paper and said that his land was not included in the Mercer find. Nobody has said it was; but one would suppose, taking Mr. Mercer's word for it that a man would feel proud to have the great, recently discovered country include his pine lands. It is not often, under any circumstances, necessary for a denial

to precede an assertion, and this effort to make a mouth-piece of the Bay City paper looks wonderfully like a halcyon against the exposure already made by the Lumberman of the Mercer discovery.

No one, after reading this history of the latest Canadian explorations, especially if it should be learned that the New York parties have passed over their \$100,000, will doubt that there are pine land operators who have the ability to worm themselves out of an uncomfortable position when they find that they have put their foot in it.

SALE OF LIMITS

The following are the details of the recent sale of timber limits in the Muskoka and Parry Sound districts:—

Table with columns: Berth, Squares, Purchaser, Price per mile. Lists various lots across different townships including Mowat, Blair, McKenry, Hardy, Patterson, Mills, Sinclair, Bethune, Proudfoot, Nachar, Strong, Joly, Fairbairn, and Himsforth.