

ONTARIO'S NEW SALT TERRITORY.

BY C. M. SINCLAIR.

I remember reading in my boyhood days a glowing description in *Harper's Magazine*, of a visit paid to the famous salt mines near Cracow, by some traveller whose name I have forgotten long since. My boyish fancy was excited by the romantic narrative of the thrilling descent into the deep, dark mine, the faint light from the few flaming torches only serving to accentuate the darkness, which could almost be felt. Then in fancy I followed the traveller through long, dark corridors of rock-salt, glistening like diamonds with the rays of the torches reflected into the noble arched chambers, with canopies of graceful stalactites depending from the ceiling.

One of these chambers was sometimes used as a ball-room, another formed a theatre, and it needed no vivid imagination to picture the fairy scenes at such times—the musicians half hidden behind huge columns of glistening rock-salt—the many-coloured lights on walls and ceilings flashing and reflecting the surrounding gems, and the brilliant crowd of men and women as a restless panorama in a matchless scene.

A visit to Ontario's new salt territory on that magnificent stream—the St. Clair river—soon dispelled the charming ideal salt-mine of my youthful recollections. There stood a square, business-looking, but decidedly unromantic frame building almost enveloped in steam. There was no thrilling descent, and, indeed, all the mine that was visible was a substantial iron pipe, about four inches in diameter, sticking up out of the well, and encasing another smaller pipe which went down more than sixteen hundred feet—the last fifty or sixty feet being through pure rock salt. Down this larger pipe—which only goes *to* the salt bed, not *into* it—and around the smaller pipe—which goes down *into* the salt fifty or sixty feet—clear, sparkling St. Clair water is forced under great pressure. This dissolves the

salt-rock, and the brine, being heavy, collects around the bottom mouth of the inner pipe, up which it is forced by the artificial water pressure down the larger encasing pipe. Thus the salt-walls are gradually being eaten away, and rising to the surface in the form of brine. On its way to the evaporating pans, after leaving the well proper, the brine-pipe passes through another encasing pipe, into which the exhaust steam is allowed to escape, so that by the time it reaches the pans it is at a high temperature, and consequently less fuel is used in converting it into the salt of commerce. The evaporating pans are simply huge, shallow iron vessels, strongly heated, the salt collecting on the bottom from which it is scraped constantly with long hoe-shaped iron rakes into bins, when it is ready for barreling. The fires are kept constantly going from Monday morning to Saturday night, as a cooling down of the huge pans means hours of loss. Just across the river not even Sunday is allowed to interfere with the work—the chimneys belch forth their black smoke the same as on any other day. Thus the salt-rock instead of being *mined* out, as in the famous Cracow mines, is brought to the surface in the form of artificially produced brine, and then re-converted into salt. In this instance, as in many others, the practical labor-saving ways of these latter times form a striking contrast to the sleepy, but more romantic methods of earlier days.

It was formerly taken for granted that the Goderich district contained all of Ontario's available salt deposits. However, as it was discovered to exist on the Michigan side of the St. Clair river, attention was drawn about 1883, to the Canadian side and the pioneer well was put down at Courtwright, twelve miles down the river from Sarnia, and a fine bed of about fifty feet thickness was struck at a depth of sixteen hundred and thirty feet: this well has been in successful