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PREVENTION OF FIRES.

Two devastating fires have occurred in the Province of Quebec, both of which are strongly suggestive of the culpable negligence of the authorities, in enforcing those preventive precautions which enlightened common sense has shewn to be absolutely necessary for the protection of life and property. The first took place in the City of Quebec on the 24th of May, and resulted in the destruction of upwards of four hundred tenements, besides two ships under construction, and a vast quantity of other combustible property, rendering houseless some five thousand people. The other fire was what is called a "bush fire" in the Saguenay district devastating an immense tract of country, destroying trees, fences, farm buildings, crops, &c., &c., laying waste a district measuring some five miles in width by about thirty six in length, and has unhoused about seven hundred families, estimated at nearly five thousand souls. Between the two fires we have therefore ten thousand people turned out of house and home with the sky for their shelter—dependent creatures on the charity of their neighbours. Of

course they will be helped, as they deserve to be; but is it not time to expose the gross stupidity and official incapacity which have made such fires possible? It should be made known and enforced by law that in a civilised community no man has the right to do what he will with his own. The building of wooden houses in a crowded city is not only a great risk to the owner, but such a danger to the whole community that the authorities would be fully justified in preventing it, and that it has been tolerated in the ancient city of Quebec, would be matter for great surprise, were it not known that its municipal affairs have been systematically mismanaged. The fire in the Saguenay district presents a case more difficult to deal with. Laws may be made to restrain the settlers from firing their clearings under certain circumstances; but they must burn their brush-wood and their felled timber if they design to crop the land; and the wind may change and carry the sparks hither and thither, as was done in this particular case, to the extent of the destruction of an amount of property almost incalculable. Still, even in the country places, municipalities should make stringent regulations for the control and

management of bush fires. Proper precautions should be insisted on for the complete isolation of the material to be burnt before the torch is set to it; and if this were done there would be no such melancholy stories to read about as that of the great fire in the Saguenay district, leaving its thousands of unfortunates houseless and dependent on the charity of strangers, or the bounty of the Provincial Government. As to the fire in Quebec, we cannot but think that the alarming extent to which it spread was entirely due to the culpable negligence of the Corporation which tolerated the construction of such combustible houses in the crowded suburb of St. Rochs. Surely if the fires of May and June, 1845, when, between the two, about two thousand eight hundred houses were burnt, had not been sufficient to warn the present generation of the citizens of Quebec, they ought, certainly, to have taken a lesson from the great fires of June, 1865, and October, 1866. These last mentioned calamities are so recent, and the track of the devouring element having been again over old ground, that it is impossible not to mingle with our sympathy for the sufferers a strong



GREAT FIRE AT QUEBEC, MAY 24TH, 1870. From a sketch by W. O. C., Lt. R. A.—SEE PAGE 487.