

The Great Miramichi Fire.

(From Cooney's 'New Brunswick and Gaspé').

From the first to the fifth of October, 1825 (a season generally very cool) an extraordinary and unnatural heat prevailed. The protracted drought of the summer, acting upon the aridity of the forests, had rendered them more than naturally combustible; and this, facilitating both the dispersion and the progress of the fires that appeared in the early part of the season, produced the unnatural warmth.

On the sixth the fire was evidently approximating to us; at different intervals of this day fitful blazes and flashes were observed to issue from different parts of the woods, particularly up the northwest, at the rear of Newcastle, in the vicinity of Douglstown and Moorfields, and along the banks of the Bartibog. Many also heard the crackling of falling trees and shrivelled branches, while a hoarse rumbling noise, not unlike the rushing of distant thunder, and divided by pauses, like the intermittent discharges of artillery, was distinct and audible.

On the seventh the heat increased to such a degree, and became so very oppressive, that many complained of its enervating effects. About 12 o'clock a pale sickly mist, lightly tinged with purple, emerged from the forest and settled over it. This cloud soon retreated before a large dark one, which, occupying its place, wrapt the firmament in a pall of vapour. This incumbrance retaining its position till about three o'clock, the heat became tormentingly sultry. There was not a single breath of air. The atmosphere was overloaded; an irresistible lassitude seized the people; and a stupifying dullness seemed to pervade every place but the woods, which now trembled and rustled and shook with an incessant and thrilling noise of explosions rapidly following each other and mingling their reports with a discordant variety of loud and boisterous sounds.

At this time the whole country appeared to be encircled by a fiery zone, which, gradually contracting its circle by the devastation it made, seemed as if it would not converge into a point while anything remained to be destroyed.

A little after four o'clock an immense pillar of smoke rose in a vertical direction at some distance northwest of Newcastle for a while, and the sky was absolutely blackened by this huge cloud; but, a light northerly breeze springing up, it gradually distended, and then melted into a variety of shapeless mists. About an

hour after, or probably at half-past five o'clock, innumerable large spires of smoke, issuing from different parts of the woods, and illuminated by flames that seemed to pierce them, mounted to the sky. A heavy and suffocating canopy, extending to the utmost verge of observation, and appearing more terrific by the vivid flashes and blazes that wriggled and darted irregularly through it, now hung over us in threatening suspension, while showers of flaming brands, calcined leaves, ashes and cinders seemed to scream through the growling noise that prevailed in the woods.

All these palpable indications of the approaching ruin were unheeded, probably because the people had never yet experienced the dreadful effects of fire, or had not sufficiently considered the change wrought in the forests by the protracted heat of the summer. Nor could any other reason have betrayed them into a neglect of the warning which Mr. Wright and others endeavoured to propagate. Had the timely admonition of these gentlemen received the attention it merited, many are of opinion that a considerable part of the calamity might have been averted. It would be cruel, however, to harrow the recollection now; experience makes wise men of us all; after having endured the evils, we become astonishing clever in prescribing antidotes.

About nine o'clock, or shortly after, a succession of loud and appalling roars thundered through the woods. Peal after peal, crash after crash, came bellowing the sentence of destruction. Every succeeding shock created fresh alarm; every clap came loaded with its own destructive energy. With greedy rapidity did they advance to the devoted scene of their ministry; nothing could impede their progress; they removed every obstacle by the desolation they occasioned. Several hundred miles of prostrate forests and smitten woods marked their devastating way. They came rushing with awful violence, devouring at every step, and hewing a frightful avenue to the spot where fury was to be consummated.

The tremendous bellowing became more and more terrific. The earth seemed to stagger as if it had reeled from its ancient foundations. The harmony of creation appeared to have been deranged and about to revert into original chaos. Earth, air, sea, and sky, all visible creation seemed to conspire against man, and to totter under