

DEVASTATING BUSH FIRES.

OUTBREAK AT RAVENSWOOD.

Ravenswood, 8th January.
Ravenswood, which was the scene of a disastrous bush fire on 22nd December last, was again threatened yesterday, when another fire occurred, the outbreak on this occasion being on Dr. Atkinson's Estate. Fortunately the fire was checked before it wrought much destruction, the extent of the damage being the burning of about 60 acres of grass and a few chains of fencing. The outbreak occurred in the afternoon near the main Melbourne road, about half a mile from the Ravenswood railway station. The main road, the Bullock Creek, and the railway line helped to confine the fire, which was successfully fought at different points, until at night it was got under control. The excellent work of the fire-fighters prevented what might have been a serious conflagration.

SEDGWICK DISTRICT VISITED.

GRASS AND TIMBER DEVASTATED. (By Our Reporter.)

The whole countryside offers wide and free scope for the fire fiend, the long and dry grass waiting to spread it in every direction. As yet the outbreaks in the north have been confined to the Ravenswood district. The first two were on the west side of the Bendigo-Melbourne railway line. The third occurred on Friday on the east side.

Just where it started is known. Just how it started is one of those mysteries associated with almost every bush fire. About 1 o'clock clouds of smoke enveloped Mount Herbert, one of the eminences on the Mount Alexander range of hills, and situated about 2½ miles east of the homestead on Dr. Atkinson's Ravenswood Estate. Driven by a north-westerly wind, the fire made rapid advance along the range towards the smaller holdings in the locality known as The Springs and Preston Vale. Practically no opposition was given the fire in its run through that section of the estate. It licked up hundreds of acres of the inviting grass, and left blazing trees and stumps in its wake. Passengers in passing trains, particularly at night, traced the route of the devastator by the burning timber.

Bounding out of the estate, the fire attacked and consumed 180 acres of grass owned by Mr. August Wirth. By this time fire-fighters were arriving from Mandurang and Sedgwick. They battled hard, and failed, to stop the onward rush of the flames. The best they could hope to do—and they succeeded—was to narrow the width of the fire, prevent it from devouring the homesteads, and save stock. Beyond Wirth's, the home of Mr. John Young was in grave danger. A little bit of orchard helped to home-savers in their good work. But a short distance ahead the weatherboard home of Mr. George Ellis—on one of the corners of Mr. Young's farm—was surrounded, and when the fire got within 15 yards of the house the position seemed hopeless. Sparks flying over the building threatened to hasten its destruction. The men, almost suffocated by smoke and consumed by the heat, fought on and won. The next house in danger was that occupied by Mr. George Storey, channel-keeper. Adjacent to the water race, the fire-fighters used water as well as wielded bush-beaters. With the exception of the narrow escape of the home of Mr. John Young, senr., until midnight no other building was in jeopardy. In that instance, also, a patch of garden around the house proved an effective fire break. On the outskirts, of course, a few fruit trees perished.

In its quickening pace the fire soon galloped over Mr. Michael Moloney's 40 acre grass paddock, and skipping over the road, almost as quickly swept 100 acres of grass land owned by the Messrs. Brennan Bros. Following the track of the fire to the south-east, Mr. George Bell (formerly M'Enroe's) lost about 175 acres of grass and timber, and Messrs. Joseph Young, John Young, senr., John Wilkinson, Matthew Tobin and Watson Bros. lost several hundreds of acres.

At midnight the van of the fire had reached the top of Mount Emu (locally known as Tobin's Hill), distant about 4½ miles from Mount Herbert. On Mount Emu the blaze was as fierce as at any time during the day, and the summit would have given promoters of public entertainments suggestions in lighting effects. There were curves and squares and pyramids that could not have been more symmetrical had they been made by hand. No pyrotechnic display could be grander. Looking back towards Mount Herbert the sight was impressive. Away on Bald Hill fading lights on the tops of the trunks of high trees resembled nothing so much as railway signals, but in the intervening gully, where the timber was thicker, the burning stumps looked like fiery mushrooms. On these hills the timber had all been rung, and was a good assistant to the grass in spreading the outbreak. The trees were more dangerous, as was seen at night, when they shed sparks like chaff.

Herein danger still lay. The wind at midnight continued blowing to the south-east, and the fire appeared to be making headway in that direction, threatening Sutton Grange and the miles of grass lands beyond. But should the wind change ever so little towards the east, and the Sedgwick Valley with its fine orchards and homesteads, would be in peril. Only a few yards intervened between burning stumps and heavily-grassed paddocks in many places.

At one stage the bridge at the head of Emu Creek caught fire, but it was saved by the efforts of a young fellow named Ernest Straw. Prominent amongst the fire-fighters were Cr. Fred Osborne and sons, Messrs. A. Wirth, M. Moloney, J. J. Brennan, Young Bros., E. Straw, Tobin Bros., Jos. Kavanagh, Albert Deravin, George Koefed, Martin Conway, Thomas Conway, junr., Hugh M'Mahon, Alex. Girvan, Albert Steen, Alf. Costa, Scultz Bros., J. Marshall, C. Hubrock, and G. Lowndes, Mrs. Tobin, Mrs. Kronk, Miss M. Montgomery and the Messrs. Drechsler materially helped the men by providing refreshments.

Not since 1900 has there been such a serious fire in that district, and by a peculiar coincidence it traversed practically the same route. On that occasion Mr. M'Enroe was a heavy loser, particularly in stacked timber.

OUTBREAK AT HEATHCOTE.

Heathcote, 8th January.
A fire broke out this afternoon in Mr. C. Robinson's crop paddock, at the north end of the town. At the time of the outbreak the harvester was at work in the crop. A large crowd of helpers soon arrived and subdued the fire. Mr. Robinson lost about half an acre of wheat and 70 or 80 acres of stubble, which had just been harvested, and some fencing. Mr. Jas. Pammenter had about eight acres of grass burnt, and a few chains of fencing.

THE SEDGWICK OUTBREAK.

SPREADS AT WEEK-END.

NOW UNDER CONTROL.

FIRE-FIGHTERS' GOOD WORK.

(By Our Reporter.)

After a serpentine course of about 20 miles, the fire that started on Dr. Atkinson's estate at Ravenswood on Friday was checked in the Cockatoo ranges, at Myrtle Creek, Sunday evening, but only by the sustained efforts and resourceful strategy of several large bands of fire-fighters. Until that point had been reached—three miles beyond "Wilkinson's" Hill—the men failed to stop the advance of the fire. Certainly they held it back on Mount Emu (or Tobin's Hill) for several hours between midnight Friday and 9 o'clock on Saturday morning. But when the wind freshened some desperate fights took place. Between 9 o'clock on Saturday morning and 4 o'clock the same afternoon the fire broke away no fewer than 15 times. On one of these occasions Cr. Osborne distinguished himself by keeping the fire under control until reinforcements arrived. Although the flames were prevented from entering the Sedgwick Valley, in which there are prosperous orchards, numerous haystacks, and substantial homesteads, they got out of hand on the southern slope of the range, and swept away the remaining grass in Mr. Matthew Tobin's paddocks. Altogether Mr. Tobin lost 600 acres. On the fire rushed with great speed, and mounted "Wilkinson's" Hill. Starting from the wide road at the end of Mr. Wilkinson's holding, and in the depression close to the Axe Creek, the fire-fighters on the Sutton Grange side of the range burnt a fire-break towards the fire as it gained the top of the hill. But the fire tore down the hill furiously, and before reaching the road covered a wider stretch of ground—about three miles—than at any stage in its track. Exciting scenes developed in the tussle at this place. Frequently the fire-fighters were not only driven back, but their means of retreat appeared to be cut off. In one of the gullies Messrs. J. Crimmen and M. Green were surrounded by fire, and it was thought they could scarcely escape being burnt to death. Fortunately they were standing on a patch of grass that did not ignite on account of it being greener. Though in their fiery furnace, and almost suffocated with smoke, the men fought on, beating the flames back with the object of keeping their small grass island from further diminishing. When the fire had raced ahead, jumping the creek and the road with the paddocks of Messrs. D. McCarthy and J. Codiga, and up into the Cockatoo range towards Myrtle Creek, the men stepped out of smoke, much to the relief of their comrades. Undeterred, they faced the flames again on Sunday, and had the satisfaction of being members of the party that started the successful firebreaks. Their courage and unselfishness was typical. Few of the fire-fighters slept during either Friday or Saturday nights.

Mr. Wilkinson lost 1000 acres of grass, and the 600 acres left cannot carry his stock. Some of the sheep were scorched, but were otherwise unhurt. Mr. Tobin had the good fortune to have had his 600 sheep penned in readiness for dipping, and they were kept out of danger. Mr. McCarthy lost 300 acres of grass, and Mr. Codiga 200 acres. In Mr. McCarthy's paddock Mr. A. Costa had 50 tons of stacked wood burnt, and on the same farm a quantity of standing wood bought by Mr. J. Blossett was also consumed. En route the fire touched the edges of grass paddocks owned by Mr. J. Montgomery and Mr. S. Mudge, and did considerable damage to the timber in the State forest, on the Cockatoo range.

Having succeeded in keeping the width of the fire within comparatively narrow limits, the fire-fighters determined on Sunday to make their last stand in the Cockatoo range. They knew that if it got beyond the range nothing would stop the fire until the Campaspe River was reached,

miles ahead. Throughout the wind had been blowing consistently from the north-west, and this enabled the leaving of smaller parties of men to prevent scattering sparks from burning trees starting new tracks of fire in the direction of Harcourt and Sutton Grange on the one side, and to Sedgwick and Strathfieldsaye on the other. Thus a large band of men and youths went ahead of the fire, and started the firebreak near Mr. Andrew Carnochan's property, and headed it in the direction of the Messrs. Pilcher and round towards Mr. Wright's—a distance of about four miles in a north and south line. As a reserve, a fire-break was prepared running east and west from Mr. Codiga's to Mr. Andrew Carnochan's. In this distance of two miles young men had cut down and removed the trees for a width of from half a chain to a chain. When the fire-break met the fire Sunday evening it did not seem necessary to start the reserve fire-break. The only danger would be in a sudden change of the direction and force of the wind. The majority of the fire-fighters left for their homes.

At about 10 o'clock on Saturday morning a fresh outbreak occurred near Mr. August Wirth's, not far from the origin of the fire at Mount Herbert, but it was quickly suppressed.

During Friday night one of the old bridges on the closed Preston Vale road was burnt. The newer bridge, which cost £200 to construct, also caught fire, but it was saved from much damage. On behalf of the Strathfieldsaye Shire Council, Cr. Osborne thanked the fire-fighters for their work.

In some cases the losses of fencing was, perhaps, heavier than the losses of grass. A good deal of the fencing was wire-netted, and altogether the damage must have been considerable. Almost without exception, the farmers beheld their blackened paddocks with calmness and fortitude. In a day or two they are likely to be seen busily engaged fencing, as if nothing had happened.

There were two distinct sections of fire-fighters on the Sedgwick and Strathfieldsaye side the names of the men were:—Messrs. Hayes Bros., Mannix Bros., C. Callahan, T. Harper, G. Harper, J. Guild, Kearns Bros., H. Kronk and Sons, A. Wirth and Sons, G. Storey and Son, Schultz Bros., C. Hubrock, A. Steane, H. Steane, A. Costa, Conway Bros., Hugh M'Mahon, George Koefed, A. De Ravin, E. Broadbent, S. Blossett, J. Cotter, J. J. Brennan, E. Straw, Fred. Osborne, Frank Osborne, M. Moloney, senr., M. Moloney, junr., M'Enroe Bros., W. Montgomery, senr., and sons, M. Tobin, Young Bros., J. Storey, Geo. Ellis, R. Bell and Sons, A. Girvan, T. Trethewey, J. Marshall, Fred. Marshall, T. Sims, H. Kregan, J. Drechsler, D. McCarthy, J. Dunn, W. Dunn, Pilcher Bros., W. Valentine, S. Mudge, J. Montgomery, M'Mahon Bros., J. Hargreaves, Byrne Bros., F. Orr, Richard Bros., Arthur Lowndes, and A. Patterson.

Those more closely connected with Sutton Grange, Harcourt and Golden Point contingents were:—Messrs. E. Beves, O. Ludlow, C. Thomas, Jas. M'Mahon, John M'Mahon, Geo. Wilkinson, Thos. Wilkinson, Jack Wilkinson, H. Urquhart, W. Eagle, G. E. Richards, Andrew Byrne, P. Byrne, D. M' Rae, H. M' Rae, John Commons, Alf. Frankling, E. B. Eagle, J. Codiga, S. Searle, M. Salathiel, Moon Bros., Broad Bros., H. Crowder, W. H. Eley, S. Warren, J. Semmens, H. Semmens, Geo. Douglas, Harold Douglas, C. E. Jelbart, F. Burlock, J. Chellev, T. O'Brien, Geo. Mitchell, M. Green, W. Young, B. M'Quillan, A. Carnochan, W. Carnochan, Patterson Bros., J. Crimmen, T. Smith, Turner Bros., R. Baker, J. Howarth, R. Davis, J. Comini, J. Timmins, and Cr. Doak.

The ladies helped materially in supplying refreshments. They were:—Sedgwick side—Mrs. J. Drechsler, Miss Drechsler, Mrs. and Miss Wirth, Misses Storey, Miss M. Montgomery, Mrs. Young, Mrs. A. Lowndes, Mrs. Tobin, Mrs. D. Montgomery, Mrs. J. Montgomery, and Mrs. Fred. Osborne. On the Sutton Grange side—Mesdames Green, Codiga, Wilkinson, M'Mahon, and Miss Semmens. Mr. Mitchell also supplied that party with a quantity of tea. On Sunday Mrs. D. Montgomery provided refreshments for a particularly large party of fire-fighters.

BUSH FIRE BRIGADES.

The outbreak has revived the bush fire brigade movement in the Sedgwick district at any rate. In discussing the matter yesterday, several of the men laid stress on the fact that during the last 13 years the three serious bush fires in that locality had each originated in Dr. Atkinson's Ravenswood estate, and travelled the same route. Therefore it was argued that the work of the bush fire brigade would be early in each summer to make a fire-break between the estate and the small holdings. Sutton Grange and Harcourt are also likely to start bush fire brigades after this experience.

OUTBREAK AT RIDDELL.

MOUNT MACEDON ABLAZE.

Riddell, 10th January.
Miles of smouldering and devastated country, overlooked by the pillar of fire into which Mount Macedon had been transformed, testified to the damage done by bush fires in the Riddell district on Friday. The fire that started on Thursday near Sunbury, and came northward toward Riddell, was brought under control on the Red Rock property of Mr. Alan Currie.

It was well guarded yesterday, but at about 5 p.m., when all was considered safe, it broke out afresh on the side of the Red Rock itself. A strong north wind was blowing, and the fire quickly traversed the property of Mr. Wilfred Johnstone, then extended to Mr. Major's and Mr. Fell's, right on to Sir Rupert Clarke's property, known as "Kismet." A great number of fire-fighters from Riddell, Sunbury and Gisborne did excellent work, but much damage was caused. Everything was thought to be secure for the night, but at 10 o'clock the wind changed to the west, and started the fire again toward Riddell. Men again mustered, and with difficulty saved the stacks and homestead of Mr. Moran. The fire-fighters stayed up all night.

Thousands of acres of grass and miles of fencing were destroyed, the greatest losers being Messrs. A. Currie, Wilfred Johnstone, Major, Deveral, Short, Fell and Moran. Mr. Major lost some sheep, and practically the whole of the country between Riddell and Sunbury was devastated. All last night the fire was seen burning on Mount Macedon. The hill resembled an active volcano.

IRRIGATION SETTLEMENTS.

OFFICIAL INSPECTION.

Melbourne, 10th January.
Mr. Elwood Mead and Mr. Cattanaoh today returned to Melbourne from a visit to the irrigation settlements at Koyuga and Tongala. Referring to their trip to-day, Mr. Mead said the Tongala settlement was younger than Bamawm, and was in a fair state of cultivation. The prospects were good, but many of the irrigation blocks were too large. The commissioners will consider the question of subdividing a number of them. Koyuga was older than Bamawm, but there were several initial difficulties to be overcome, such as the rabbit pest, the infection of the area with thistles, and the fact that much of the land was timbered. Great difficulty was experienced in clearing it, but now the district was looking very well. At that settlement also the blocks were too large, and the commissioners had a conference with the settlers on the subject. In a few instances subdivision would be arranged for, but in many others the settlers urged that they should be allowed another year or two in which they could endeavor to bring their blocks up to a proper state of cultivation.

TALE OF THE SEA.

COLLIER ON FIRE.

CREW'S THRILLING EXPERIENCES.

VANCOUVER, 8th January.
The German barque Eilbek has arrived at Astoria, Washington, with the captain and crew of the British collier Battle Abbey.

It appears that the Battle Abbey while voyaging from Newcastle (N.S.W.) to Vancouver was burned at sea last month through her coal cargo catching fire. The crew fought the flames for a week, but the fire won, and they had to take to the whale boat. Three days later the Eilbek hove in sight and rescued everybody. In addition to the officers and crew, the castaways included the captain's wife and two daughters.

Captain Marsters, of the Battle Abbey, when interviewed at Astoria this morning, said that his vessel made a fair passage until she was caught fire. Then, however, the coal caught fire. For days they fought the flames, but without success. In the early hours of 30th December it was apparent that the ship must be abandoned. A heavy sea was running, and the first boat lowered was smashed against the steamer's side. The second boat was stove in, but the third boat was lowered without misadventure. In the early dawn they put off into the ocean, seeking the nearest land, but on 2nd January the Eilbek rescued them.

Captain Marsters believes that the Battle Abbey will have blown up ere this owing to the huge quantities of gas generated in her holds.

PROHIBITION IN CANADA.

TEMPERANCE SUCCESSES.

TORONTO, 6th January.
The temperance party came out well in the local option vote taken this month in Ontario. Fifteen townships decided in favor of "no liquor," and in only five townships were the temperance advocates defeated. In 10 townships, however, the majority in favor was not sufficient to carry prohibition.

The father of the family had stepped into a book shop to buy a Christmas present for his 14-year-old son. "What kind of book would you like?" asked the bookseller, to whom he had confided his purpose. "Something that would be useful for the boy," was his reply. "Well, here's a good one on 'Self-Help.'" "Self-help" exclaimed the father. "Ben don't need anything of that kind. You ought to see him at the dinner table!"

Foreman: "Could you do anything with a shovel?" Applicant for Job: "Well, I think I could cook a bit of ham on one if I had some."