

FIRES ON THE PRAIRIE.

Nothing in Nature Equal Them.

Denver Letter in New York Sun.

The fires that recently devastated the prairie in northern Michigan and Wisconsin, other recent fires that swept across areas of prairie lands in Manitoba and North Dakota and still other fires that burned over square miles among the Rocky Mountains have revived a train of reminiscences among the old-time plainmen out there in great prairie fires two or three decades ago. One who has never seen a prairie fire such as used very fall to devastate the plains from the Missouri river to the Rocky mountains and from the Rio Grande to the Central British America can have no idea what such enormous conflagrations were. No one has yet adequately described the frightful solemnity, grandeur and the awfulness of a prairie fire, tens of thousands of acres broad, rolling, rising and falling forward like an enraged titan monster and leaving in the trail smoking ruins from horizon to horizon. Mark Twain has said that the most colossal, awing thing in nature is a great fire on the prairie, such as he saw in Nebraska in the fall of 1860. Prairie fires with solid walls of flames twenty-five and thirty-five feet high, extending ten and more miles as the wind might be blowing, have been described by descriptive writers and have been vivid with one another in effort to depict the sensations that come upon who locks upon a sweeping, roaring prairie fire, but all efforts have failed. The burning of Moscow in the conflagration at Chicago have been faithfully pictured in song and story, but it has remained for the sage of the plains to tell with the degree of adequacy of the prairie fire. "It is," says he, "the spirit fire, who in anger has drawn his flames across the path of the man." A large part of the prairie is now broken up by settlements that have been lost much of their old-time grandeur, but the very fact of the settlement makes the danger of prairie life the greater. When a prairie fire from the Gulf of Mexico crosses the boundary of the United States, and even beyond, was almost a great fire could sweep along from one end of it to the other doing no damage except to the game that overtake in its mad chase. The settlement of the danger to man, and as long as there are any miserable stretches of prairie there always danger unless the farm ranges and villages are carefully guarded with fire breaks. In 1874 some hunters started a fire in Bon Homme county, Dakota territory, opposite Niobrara. There was a strong southwest wind and it swept to the northwest over 300 miles, licking up the dry grass and rolling up great volumes of smoke on the soft September air upward of a week. This one comparatively narrow, being kept spreading to the westward by the river, and from making much of the east at first by the river and later by the wind, which eddied more to the east; but in some places the tract burned over reached a width of seventy-five miles, and it burned perhaps fifty. The fire took over a week to go more than 200 miles. This was slow, but several things were taken into consideration. In places the grass was short, necessarily hindered its progress. There was little or no wind at night, so it, of course, moved slowly then. At other times, it got among stretches of blue grass or other tall grass, like any prairie fire, traveled at such a pace, he he ever so fleet, and not long kept ahead. The grass, of course, irregular, and as it would frequently happen that the advancing arms would join miles ahead of the main line and rushing onward, forming a front and leaving a rapidly disappearing island of unburned grass behind. The left of the mighty advancing fire was retarded the third day in passing through the hills. Later the right became entangled among the Weeping willows and fell behind. It finally stopped among the cottonwood close to the Missouri river, in the neighborhood of Le Beau and Boise Cache creek. In fact, it was the river that stopped it, for had it not been there or had the wind got into the south, it would have swept on 250 miles further, out of Dakota and into the British possessions, no one knows how far. Probably about 28,000 square miles of prairie was burned over by this moving sea of fire. About thirty hunters and a few families were caught in that fire and burned to death. Hundreds of buffaloes and antelopes were roasted. Among the most devastating of the last great fires on the plains was one in 1880. A prairie fire swept down from British Columbia, across the international line into Dakota, until it reached the Northern Pacific railroad. At its greatest width, in Northern Dakota, the flames were 150 miles wide. Over 10,000 square miles were covered by the sweeping fire. Passengers on the Northern Pacific railroad had a chance to see part of the awful fire and to this day there are those among the passengers who say that the sound of the roaring flames and the enormous walls of flame moving over the dry grass in leaps and bounds, like red, angry, belching, fiery surfs, was terrible beyond description. For two days and three nights the flames could be seen raging to the north of the railroad tracks. The great tongues of flames seemed to be shooting higher than the cars and almost reaching them, though they were really further away than they looked, being held back by the company's fire break or burned strip along the track. There was no sleep on the trains passing that fire, but the windows and platforms were crowded with passengers, eagerly watching the rolling flames. Antelopes, deer, prairie wolves, foxes, jackrabbits and other animals could be seen in great numbers hurrying before the flames and crossing the track. It frequently happened that some of them were run over by the train and killed. Those that reached the south side of the track found safety for the time being, at least, as the fire did not cross. Later in the season, however, the usual smaller fires prevailed south of the railroad. Many a man has been hanged or shot to death if the conveniences for hanging were not to be had on the treeless, poleless plains, for starting prairie fires. The cattlemen and cowboys, assisted by the soldiers at the army posts on the prairie always started out immediately after a prairie fire to investigate the cause. But very often there was nothing left to tell the tale of the origin of the conflagration. The plainmen were, however, so angry usually at their losses and the suffering and death of human beings and beasts in the fire that they meant to fix the blame somewhere. No doubt scores of men have been hanged for starting prairie fires when they were either innocent or the fire had been started by carelessness. In August, 1870, when the great prairie fire of western Kansas swept from the Arkansas river down into Indian territory, a distance of nearly 300 miles, the origin of a fire was traced by a gang of cattlemen to a round-up party in the employ of the Arkansas Cattle company, located near where Coolidge, Kan., has since grown up. The Texans went to Dodge City and secretly told the Arkansas cowboys. A posse started across the plains, sixty miles to their camp. The latter were arrested and the trial began at once. The prosecution contended that a grudge had existed between the prisoners and the Texas cattlemen, that the prisoners had sworn vengeance against the Texas cattlemen at the earliest opportunity and that when the prisoners had learned that the Texas fellows were in western Kansas driving a herd slowly on the way to Dodge City market, they had set fire to the prairie grass, so that its flames would envelope the whole region, destroy the Texas herd, and anyhow, burn all the fodder for any Texas herds coming that way. The testimony of several cowboys, who swore they knew the plans of the prisoners was introduced. The trial started at 11 p. m., and closed at 2 a. m. The prisoners numbered seven men and one boy. Six of the prisoners were condemned to death. The boy and one man were ordered out of Kansas on pain of death if seen in the State after forty-eight hours. Forthwith the posse, with the six condemned prisoners, bound and helpless, on horseback, started for a grove of cottonwood trees ten miles distant on the banks of the Arkansas river. Just as the sun was shooting its earliest rays across the blackened plains the last two of the six alleged starters of the prairie fire were hanged. Fire breaks are plowed by the men in the prairie towns every August and

September. A fire break is made by plowing a few furrows outside and entirely around the town. Further out, say 100 yards, another circle is made, and then the grass burned between. This effectually prevents any hostile fire from taking the community. It very frequently happens that this fire break is constructed after the fire which it is intended to guard against has appeared. On such occasions while one party goes out with brooms, shovels, old grain sacks and other weapons to stay the progress of the fire as much as possible, another attaches teams to all the plows that can be found and begins to make the needed furrows. As soon as the furrows are turned the back fire between is started, and usually the town is saved. The fire breaks, simple as they are, have saved thousands of lives of settlers in the west, and protected a vast amount of capital invested in farming property and homes of poor families.

Her Kiss was Death.

The art of poisoning, if we are to believe an eminent authority, must be reckoned among the lost arts. It is not because we are less cruel than our ancestors, and carry our refinement even into our crimes: we are less unscrupulous or cruel than our forefathers were. Though the toxicology of the ancients were necessarily incomplete, there is every reason to believe that antiquity was acquainted with the use of arsenic, opium, henbane and prussic acid. The oldest poison in use was probably an impregnation of serpent-venom. Theophrastus speaks of a poison made from acouite, with rapid or slow effects in accordance with the operator's wishes. During the empire the removal of inconvenient people by means of poison had become so common that the emperors had a number of men in their service, whose duty it was to taste all dishes put upon the imperial table, and no dinner was partaken of without one of the court physicians being present. One of the most notorious poisoners of the day was Locusta, the murderer of Claudius and Britannicus. About the year 331 B. C., large numbers of women, belonging to the higher classes of Roman society, were indicted for poisoning their husbands (a modern instance of the epidemic occurred of late years in Hungary.) One hundred and seventy were convicted and condemned.

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were the halcyon days of poisoning. There is no doubt that La Spars, and the, if possible, still more wretched hag, La Tuffania, were as bad as you make them. The latter is said to have caused the death of over 600 persons. She used a preparation of arsenic, which she sold under the name of "Acqua Toffana." It was a slow poison, the victim growing daily weaker and gradually dying from physical exhaustion. In France the most notorious female poisoners were Mme. de Brinvilliers (who was taught the secret of the "succession power" by Ste. Croix, which she successfully administered to her father and brothers,) and the still more notorious Lavoisier and Lavigoreux, who, being ostensibly midwives, carried their poisons to high and low—married couples anxious to hasten the dissolution of the irksome tie or needy heirs wished to accelerate the departure of rich relatives. A veritable mania for poisoning appears to have set in toward the middle of the seventeenth century.

In England poisoning was declared, by an Act passed in the reign of Henry VIII, to be high treason, and those guilty of it were to be boiled alive. The most notorious case (of the poisoning of James I, by Buckingham, is only surmised,) of poisoning was that of Sir Thomas Overbury, in the year 1613. He had incurred the displeasure of Lord Chester and his wife, and they had both vowed to be revenged on him. So after they had got him committed to the tower, they set themselves to poison his food by mixing arsenic and cathartics with it. For many months, though suffering intensely, he appears to have lingered on. At last a stronger dose than usual put an end to his miserable existence. The guilty couple, to the king's everlasting disgrace, were released after five years' imprisonment.

One of the most curious points connected with poison is the fact that nations and individuals have been known to thrive on it. Mithridates, the king of Pontus, had poison for his daily food. In the Gesta Romanorum we read that "the queen of the north, having heard of the great proficiency which Alexander the Great made in learning, under the tuition of Aristotle, nourished her daughter, from her cradle, on a certain kind of deadly poison; and when she grew up she was considered so beautiful that the sight of her alone affected many with madness." The young lady was sent to Alexander, who, of course, fell madly in love with her. Aristotle, who knew of the plot, warned the king, who, thereupon, commanded a criminal whom he had condemned to death to kiss the girl. Scarcely had the man touched her ruby lips before "his whole frame was impregnated with

poison, and he expired in the greatest agony." In the present day it is well known that the present girls of Styria consume large quantities of arsenic to add to their personal charms. It is a common habit also among men. It is said to improve the complexion, to promote digestion and to strengthen the respiratory organs. The worst of it is that when once you have commenced taking the drug it means death to leave it off.—London Church Gazette.

Ten Years in Jail for a Brother's Crime.

Michael O'Donnell, who was sentenced to thirty years in Sing Sing prison, and has served ten of them, for a crime committed by his brother James, will be released now, because the deathbed confession of his brother, the real criminal, has been introduced as true by the district attorney.

Michael O'Donnell's reputation as a worthless, troublesome character went far to condemn him, yet he had ideas of duty and self sacrifice of his own. At any time during ten years he might have said that his brother James was guilty of the crime for which he was serving, yet when he knew that his brother had confessed, months ago, he only said, "He'll die soon, Jim will. Let him die in peace. Then you can get me out." While he was under arrest for the crime his brother was in hiding recovering from wounds received on the night of the robbery with which Michael was charged.

John R. Fellows, who convicted Michael O'Donnell, is dead. So is Judge Randolph B. Martine, who sentenced him. So is Michael Feehan, who, with James O'Donnell and a man named Kelly robbed Max G. Stein, in his saloon at No. 410 East Sixty-fourth street, in April, 1888. And on the night of April 8 last, precisely ten years after the crime was committed, James O'Donnell confessed that he, and not his brother Michael, was Feehan's accomplice. Feehan's friends had applied for his pardon, and on the day it was granted Feehan died in Sing Sing. Friends took up O'Donnell's case a year ago, but it was not until a few days ago that his innocence was made clear and the district attorney decided to act.

James O'Donnell, with Feehan and Kelly, broke into Stein's saloon, robbed the till, and when the proprietor came from his rooms in the rear into the bar, held him up and went through his pockets. It was easy work as long as Stein was terrified and helpless, and the robbers, believing him helpless from fright, remained in the bar long enough to help themselves to a drink.

But Stein got his revolver and opened fire. The burglars fired in return. Although he did not know it, Stein wounded James O'Donnell and Kelly. They ran, crippled, but able to escape. Feehan, unhurt and desperate, fired at Stein and closed with him. After a rough and tumble struggle he broke from the saloonkeeper and ran into the arms of a policeman who was hurrying to the saloon. Feehan thus was taken red handed.

James O'Donnell went to the house of his mother and brothers, at No. 413 East Sixty-third street. He was bleeding from his wounds. As he fled from the saloon one of Stein's bullets lifted his hat from his head, and he did not stop to pick it up. He feared that it would assist the police in tracing him after the trail of blood, which he left for several blocks ceased. He awakened his brother Michael.

"You go back and get my hat, Mike," he said. And "Mike" went. James and Michael O'Donnell resembled each other in those days. The police and Stein were on the lookout near the saloon. When Michael O'Donnell was within two hundred feet of the place he was arrested. Stein identified him positively as one of the robbers.

Feehan, who pleaded guilty, and had nothing to gain by his testimony, having already been sentenced to thirty years in Sing Sing, swore that Michael O'Donnell was not with him on the night of the burglary. O'Donnell, too, made stout denial of guilt. There was strong evidence tending to establish an alibi, but it was regarded as untrustworthy. Judge Martine gave O'Donnell the maximum sentence, and the man went to Sing Sing.

Feehan would not mention James O'Donnell. He would betray no one, although he swore that Michael O'Donnell was not guilty. Michael O'Donnell would not incriminate his brother, though he could have saved himself by doing so, for James at that time could have been produced, wounded by Stein's bullets. So Michael O'Donnell was "sent away" to "do his brother's bit," as the rest of the "gang" said. Edward Kelly, who, with James O'Donnell and Feehan, robbed Stein, escaped at the time, but was imprisoned subsequently for another crime.

Feehan died in prison. James O'Donnell, morose from the time that prison doors closed on his brother, heard that Feehan had confessed the facts. "Now Mike will go off his

head, too," he said. But "Mike" said nothing. Finally, a year or more ago, James O'Donnell told his story to State Senator Maurice Featherston. He was ill with consumption and said he realized that he might have to go to prison in his brother's place, but must relieve his conscience. Mr. Featherston went to Sing Sing and inquired concerning Feehan's last statement. Then he saw Michael O'Donnell and told him of "Jim's" confession.

"I've been here near ten years now," said Mike. "Jim hasn't long to live. Let him live his few days in peace. Then you can get me out if you want to."

James O'Donnell, dying of consumption, was removed to the Presbyterian hospital in April last, and before he died he signed an affidavit asserting his guilt and his brother's innocence. He died on the tenth anniversary of the crime.

Mr. Featherston appealed to Governor Black, and an investigation of the case was made at the governor's suggestion by District Attorney Gardiner, with the result that yesterday Colonel Gardiner sent to Albany a long communication, which will result doubtless in the liberation of Michael O'Donnell.

This communication goes far to prove that Michael O'Donnell was practically judged on his record, and the evidence establishing an alibi for him was disbelieved by the jury, who thought his mother and brothers and Feehan were trying to save him by perjury.—New York Herald.

How to Prevent Pneumonia.

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A Game That Failed.

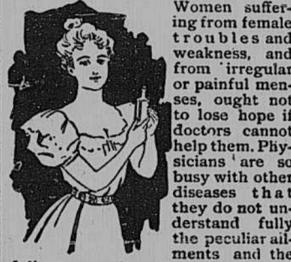
At Fort Sheridan a cavalry regiment was being examined physically before being mustered out, those who were found disabled in any way being recommended for a pension. At a sitting of the examining board a trooper presented himself who claimed to have become totally deaf. If he could prove this, it would entitle him to a neat stipend for the rest of his days. The officers asked him various questions about his deafness; but he apparently failed to hear any of them. They tried to surprise him into making some remark which would show that he was shamming, but they could do nothing of the kind. Finally one of the officers held a watch to the man's ear, while another stepped to the end of the room.

"Now, then," said the officer at a distance, speaking in an ordinary tone of voice, "can you hear that, sir?" "No, sir," was the prompt reply.

The applicant was not recommended for a pension.—Chicago Journal.

—Rosin and tallow make a good covering for wounds in trees.

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