

were the beginning of Austin, and the town grew until it had a population a few years ago which, Mr. Van Wert said, must have reached 5,000. At present he did not believe there were 2,500 persons in the town. Most of the population was housed on the main street, and there are few houses on the steep side hills. A smaller valley ran out of the main valley at an angle, and in this perhaps less than one-quarter of the population of Austin lived. This section must have escaped, he thought.

The manager of the Emporium Mills knew little about the recent condition of the dam. He said that about a year ago, while it was still in course of construction, a warning had gone out to the people in the valley that the top of the dam was unsafe, and a large section was cut away, relieving the water pressure until repairs were made.

What the nature of the repairs were Mr. Van Wert was unable to say. He had not been up the valley for several months past, but he was under the impression that workmen were still engaged on the dam. The fact that a warning had been sent out when the dam was in danger before made him believe that the disaster might not be so bad as at first reported—that the weakness might have been discovered in time to warn the villagers.

As for property damage, Mr. Van Wert could make no estimates. His own plant must be pretty thoroughly destroyed, he thought, as it lay right in the path of the flood. Much of the loss would depend, he said, on the amount of hardwood lumber carried away beyond recovery. His firm, he said, usually carried about 25,000,000 feet, or \$300,000 or \$400,000 worth of hardwood lumber at its several plants, and usually about one-third of this was in Austin. Mr. Bayless made his headquarters in Austin most of the time, but this home was on higher ground than those of the workmen.

The Emporium Lumber Company employed about 1,200 men, all told, but of these only about 50 or 75 were employed in the mill itself. Most of the other employees, however, as did most of the wage-earners in the whole tributary lumbering section, kept their families in the town. There is no Saturday half holiday in the mills, and most of the workmen were probably at their posts when the break came.

with a sheer, V-shaped wall of gray concrete. The sides of the valley are steep, and the dam, which Mr. Van Wert said was anywhere from 300 to 500 feet wide, was about 100 feet high. Back of it, Mr. Van Wert said, the tens of millions of gallons of stored water were enough to submerge everything in the valley.

#### Population Had Dwindled.

Mr. Van Wert said that one fortunate circumstance was that the town had been dwindling for several years. He estimated that perhaps 25 per cent. of the houses were empty. This, he explained, was because of the shutting down gradually of the great hemlock mills of the C. W. Goodyear Lumber Company of Buffalo, which in their prime were the largest hemlock sawmills in the world. They

When the dam made trouble a year ago the base had advanced some 12 inches in the centre.

"The water was let out and the whole structure reinforced. We employed the best engineering talent we knew of. We were confident that the dam was all right, but made doubly sure by building the second dam up stream."

Mr. Bayless said that he had not been able to get in direct touch with Austin, but had been phoned by an employe who had made his way to a nearby town. A good part of the pulp mill has been left standing, he said, through the action of the great stacks of cordwood being carried across the foundations and piled up into a sort of wing dam which diverted the flow of water.

Vice President A. J. Schlager of the Bayless Pulp and Paper Company was shocked to hear over the long-distance telephone from THE TIMES at his home in Binghamton last night of the disaster at Austin. He said he knew nothing of the construction of the dam at Austin or the nature of the repairs that had been made. He talked through Mrs. Schlager on the plea that he could not hear very well over the telephone. Mrs. Schlager said that the Vice President was not an active officer of the company and knew nothing about things at the plant.

#### VILLAGE FEARED DISASTER.

Accident to Dam Last Year Made Folk Nervous, Says Pulp Company Manager.

One of the largest enterprises in Austin outside of the Bayless Pulp and Paper plant is the mills and lumber yards of the Emporium Lumber Company, a million-dollar concern, which is one of the largest cutters of hardwood timber in the East.

W. Everitt Van Wert, New York manager of the company, returned to his home, in Mount Vernon, last week, after several days' stay at the Austin plant.

News of the disaster was telephoned to his home by a TIMES reporter, and Mr. Van Wert came to THE TIMES office from Mount Vernon to get further news of the extent of the damage.

"The town of Austin," said Mr. Van Wert, "had been nervous about the Bayless dam for some time. When I was in Austin I discussed with the Vice President of the company the danger of the dam giving way. The whole town was nervous about it, and it was a topic of conversation at the local hotel. Everybody realized that if the structure gave way the whole town would be wiped out. The fact that when the concrete work proved defective a year ago the dam had given warning, and the engineers were able to save it, had been of some reassurance, and people, while fearing that it might break some day, were less nervous, believing that they would be able to clear out before the flood came."

"The lumber company felt the danger was serious enough to warrant a thinning out of their highest grade of hardwoods, and for some time only the lower grades have been stored on the flats. The higher grades have been shipped out as fast as possible and surplus stock kept in sheds on the higher ground. Some of the company's lumber is worth from \$100 to \$150 a thousand feet."

#### Dam Saved a Year Ago.

"When the dam weakened about a year ago it was actually pushed out of place several inches at the top. I was not there at the time, but the stories I heard were that the shifting of the dam had given the company's engineers warning so that they were able to relieve the strain by blowing out with dynamite the top of the dam, a section at a time, to let out the water gradually."

"There was some damage done then. A number of houses were washed away, but they had been emptied of people and the property damage was small. Most of the workmen are native Americans from that section. Practically all of the skilled hands and the timber fellers are native Pennsylvanians."

"The management of the pulp mill," Mr. Van Wert said, "has been in charge of George C. Bayless, who went to Austin for five days each week, returning to his home in Binghamton on Sunday. I talked to Mr. Bayless about the pulp-mill dam only a week ago, and he assured me that the new work and the reinforcement put in had made the structure absolutely safe. He told me he had had the best engineering advice on it and was perfectly satisfied that it would never make trouble again."

"None of the enterprises in the valley used water power, and the dam was purely for water storage purposes. The valley behind the dam is very steep, and the water, though very deep at the dam apron, did not extend up the valley far. For this reason the flood must have flashed through the lower valley quickly and with great force. Nothing in its path could have withstood it. This quick passing of the water also accounts for the lack of water for fire fighting."

"There was in recent years only one other industry in the valley besides the Emporium plant and the Bayless pulp mill. That was a small kindling wood plant which made use of the by-products of the lumber mills. The old Goodyear mills were dismantled and were directly in the path of the flood."

#### Pulp Mill in Flood's Path.

"The Bayless Pulp and Paper Company's plant covered about three or four acres directly under the dam," Mr. Van Wert said. "Most of the ground was taken up with great stacks of cordwood for pulp making. The town is isolated in the mountains, and there is no farming population near by to make it a shopping centre. The only way in and out of the valley is by the Buffalo & Susquehanna Railway. The people of Austin have been accustomed to go to Coudersport, Penn., just over the mountain, to shop, to Olean, N. Y., and to Port Allegheny."

"Some of the principal stores in Austin," Mr. Van Wert added, "were wiped out about six months ago in a fire which destroyed nearly a block in the heart of the business section. The ruins had not been rebuilt to any great extent because of the falling away of population. The chief reason for the building of the Bayless dam was the denudation of the forests for pulp wood. For several Summers the mills had been without sufficient water to operate at full capacity and the dam was a necessity for all year-round operation."

"The Emporium Lumber Company has been planting hardwood extensively on its properties in recent years. Its President, W. L. Sykes, is Chairman of the Forestry Committee of the National Hardwood Lumber Dealers' Association, and has been a leader in the movement against destructive lumbering operations."

Mr. Van Wert described the Bayless dam and the narrow valley below it. He said that if the dam had split from top to bottom he did not see how any one in the little town below could have escaped. The Emporium Lumber Company has a small mill dam in the lower valley, about half a mile from the Bayless plant. Mr. Van Wert said that between his mill and the paper company's storage dam the village straggled up the valley on both sides of a narrow street. It was purely a mill town, and the houses were mostly flimsy homes of workmen, most of them built since the paper and lumber enterprises went to the valley, about a score of years ago.

The valley, Mr. Van Wert said, is little more than a defile, with high hills on either side, which were denuded of their timber years ago. The dam of the paper mill closes the upper end of the valley

#### THIEVES LOOTING HOUSES.

Rush Into Deserted Homes and Carry On Their Work Unhindered.

Special to The New York Times.

OLEAN, N. Y., Sept. 30.—A telegram from Keating Summit to-night says that Mr. Hilton of Smethport, member of the Pennsylvania Assembly from McKean County, has appealed to Harrisburg to have the State Constabulary rushed to Austin to prevent the pillaging of deserted homes. Thieves set to work immediately and began looting the houses. A relief expedition of doctors and nurses was sent from Smethport, Penn., immediately upon the receipt of the news. A relief car left Olean on the Pennsylvania train leaving here shortly after 9 P. M. All wires, both telegraph and telephone, are down to Austin, and it is impossible to get definite information.

John R. Droney, President of The Olean Times, who was on his way from Philadelphia on the Pennsylvania Flier reaching Keating Summit at 5 P. M., reports that a horseman speeding madly toward the station as the train drew in, hysterically cried out that the whole town had been swept away.

Miss Cora Mitchell, whose home is at Olean, was one of the few to escape from Main Street as the torrent swept down on the village. She says that the first warning that the people in the town had that danger was impending was the blowing of the whistle at the paper mill about half a mile above the town, and that even then the people were inclined to doubt the imminence of the danger. Hardly had she and her companions, who were employed in a millinery store, reached the high ground, before the Austin home-stead, the home of the founder of the village, was swept away and the store in which they had been working a few moments previously was carried from its foundations and broken up by the terrible force of the rushing waters.

#### WHAT MR. BAYLESS SAYS.

Believes His Mill Hands Escaped and Missing Are Safe in Hills.

F. J. Bayless, Secretary and Treasurer of the Bayless Pulp and Paper Company, was reached over the long distance telephone at Binghamton last night. He said that he had had word from one of his mill men by telephone, and that all of the hands, about 200, had escaped. The dam went out at the sides, he said, and the men in the mill heard the cracking before it gave way. Simultaneously a man whose name Mr. Bayless had not learned ran in from the dam to the mill telephone. He gave warning to the town over the telephone. The town was for the most part located half a mile below the dam, Mr. Bayless said, and must have had some warning if the central telephone operators kept their wits. All of the mill's 200 hands were able to get out of the buildings and to high ground before the flood came.

"I believe that many of those reported missing are safe," Mr. Bayless said. "We have heard of forty bodies found and several hundred missing. With warning, most of the people in the lower valley must have escaped. I believe that when a count is made in the morning the missing will be found to have taken refuge in the hills."

"The fact that our 200 hands, scattered over three or four acres of plant right under the dam, got away proves that there was warning. The dam had been thoroughly overhauled. It was designed to hold forty-eight feet of water and had only forty feet behind it. Further, we had built a second dam, a mile above the first, to keep the volume of water down. The second dam enabled us to reduce the level behind the first dam to 140 feet.