

us now will be different only in degree if we allow the western forests also to be exhausted and are compelled to import most of our lumber from Siberia or South America.

Doubtless the extreme conditions of the present lumber markets will be relieved in no great length of time and more moderate prices will prevail. The outstanding fact remains, however, that lumber price levels higher than those existing before the war must be expected because of the depletion, or approaching depletion, of our forest regions east of the Great Plains. We are fast losing that great leveler of lumber prices, the competition between different forest regions available to a common market. The scarcity of forest products of high quality, cut from old growth timber, will not be readily or quickly overcome. Meantime forest depletion is going steadily on unchecked. It must lead inevitably to rising price levels under normal conditions. It will contribute to sudden and excessive increases in lumber prices in any future transportation, labor or other crisis.

Why Timber Depletion?

The real cause of our timber depletion is idle forest land. Shortages of wood have not resulted primarily from the use of our forests, but from their devastation. The kernel of the problem lies in the enormous areas of forest land which are not producing the timber crops that they should. There are 326 million acres of cut-over timber lands bearing no saw timber in the United States. Their condition ranges from complete devastation through various stages of partial restocking or restocking with trees of inferior quality, to relatively limited areas which are producing timber at or near their full capacity. On eighty-one million acres there is practically no forest growth. This is the result of forest fires and of methods of cutting which destroy or prevent new timber growth.

The area of idle or largely idle land is being increased by from three to four million acres annually as the cutting and burning of forests continue. The enormous area of forest land in the United States not required for any other eco-

nomie use, estimated at four hundred sixty-three million acres, would provide an ample supply of wood if it were kept productive. Depletion has resulted, not from using our timber resources, but from failure to use our timber-growing land.

It is unthinkable that the United States should be compelled to steadily contract its use of timber—down to the level of civilized existence as in the countries of western Europe. We are not an old world nation. We will have millions of acres of raw agricultural land to be developed. We still have millions of homes to be built and thousands of miles of T-rails to be laid. We are at the threshold of the greatest opportunity to expand our world trade in manufactures which we have ever had. It is unthinkable, I say, that in the face of these vast requirements and opportunities, the people of the United States should be content to watch one of their essential and readily renewable raw materials become steadily scarcer and less available; that they should accept famine prices on timber as a normal condition, with enforced contractions in its use, embargoes, and governmental restrictions. And such a course is as unnecessary as it would be disastrous.

We have an ample area of forest growing land, over and above any probable demands for farm crops, most of it indeed unfit for cultivation—an area ample to meet all of our timber requirements if its timber-growing capacity is put to use. From every hand, during the last few months, we have been told to increase production as the cure of our economic ills. I submit that increased production from land is as necessary as increased production by human labor. The idleness of millions of acres of forest growing land may be even more disastrous in its ultimate effects than the idleness of hundreds of thousands of skilled mechanics. And we have in America to-day an area of idle forest land equal to the combined forest of Continental Europe aside from Russia.

The answer to the forestry problems of the United States is not to use less wood but to grow more—to put our idle