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Export Problem and British Columbia Lumber

Increase of Knowledge and Modern Selling Methods as Well as Co-operation in Order to Stabilize the Industry Are Necessary to Develop Export Trade.

Mr. H. R. MacMillan, who has recently resigned from the position of Special Canadian Timber Commissioner and formerly Chief Forester of British Columbia, delivered the following address before the British Columbia Forest Club:—

The special investigation of foreign lumber markets undertaken during the past two years by the Department of Trade and Commerce, was in recognition of the fact that the present timber situation in British Columbia constitutes a national problem. It was realized that the capacity existing in Western Canada for the production of lumber was far in advance of the domestic requirements, and that the growing carrying charges would force timber holders endeavouring to realize something on their investment to build new mills in an already overstocked field. It did not seem possible that the domestic market could expand rapidly enough to absorb the production of present mills, together with the output of the mills which students of the stumpage situation believe will be built during the next five to ten years. The object of the investigation was to learn the possibility of Canadian lumber producers entering foreign markets to such an extent as to keep mills fully employed, capital productive, and to prevent the ruinous conditions which have been faced here from time to time, resulting from over-production in the domestic market.

The provincial forest service, in supporting this investigation by the Department of Trade and Commerce, did so because it is realized that wise forest administration in British Columbia depends upon there being profit instead of loss in the logging and lumbering business. In other parts of the world, where the forestry idea has developed, the duties of the forester, broadly speaking, are restricted to protecting the public or private forests against loss by fire or wasteful use. A portion of the investment necessary for fire protection is now being made. I advisedly say, a portion, for I am firmly convinced that if we are to protect our standing timber in British Columbia through all bad seasons as well as good, we must make a larger investment in education, patrol and fire-fighting aids. Forest administration in British Columbia has not gone

beyond preliminary business management and fire protection. It cannot well go further while the existing stumpage situation exists on the Pacific Coast, where throughout the Douglas fir belt areas of timber (large enough to supply the available markets for the next century) have been allowed to pass into the hands of owners, who, in order to rescue their capital or realize their long anticipated profits, will try to cut in twenty or thirty years.

It is now realized by foresters on the Pacific Coast that in the stumpage situation they are face to face with a problem even more serious than fire protection, more difficult to handle, and more dangerous. I say more dangerous for the reason that it now lies in the hands of an unorganized, inexperienced mob of timber owners on the Pacific slope, by stampeding to cut their holdings, to cause more loss to the state and the public, by maintaining an over-production of lumber, than can reasonably be expected from any series of bad fire seasons. I do not depreciate the danger of fires. I simply desire to emphasize that billions of stumpage held by financially weak holders, unaware of market conditions, or determined to take their loss and rescue a part of their investment, constitutes a club held over Pacific Coast forest policy, which under present conditions will render it impossible for any government to insist on clean logging, or in other words lack of broad enough markets, that restricts our logging to the cream of the forest and on even the best tracts leaves a third of the timber on the ground. We all know that while such conditions continue, these—the last virgin forests—will be destroyed without being utilized.

Here, then, is the problem for the forester on the Pacific slope. It is a greater problem than fire protection, now that co-operating forces have controlled fire losses. The forester on the Pacific slope must broaden his outlook, he must blaze a new trail, and while he may have in certain denuded districts the same duties as the foresters in the East or elsewhere, in restocking and protecting wrecked forests, his great work is the handling of the vast surplus asset of timber in such a manner that it may be put on the market, only as the market requires it, without waste, without loss in operating and without forest destruction.

This is the problem which has confronted the Provincial Forest Service since the preliminary organization was completed. Needless to say, it is not only one of the great

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Robert Baird, M.A.,
Inspector of Municipalities.

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