

# How the United States Lost an Opportunity.

## Why the Southern Half of the Turtle Mountain is not a National Forest.

Some time ago before the matter was understood as it is today there was an agitation for the throwing open of the Turtle Mountain Forest Reserve in Manitoba for settlement. It was pointed out by a number of authorities that the land was unsuited to agriculture and that to throw open the reserve would result in the stripping off of the timber and the settlers would soon find they could not make a living. There would then follow, as in similar cases in Ontario and Quebec, the abandonment of these farms. The settlers would have to begin over again in some other part, and the Government would have to do, as Ontario and Quebec are now doing—plant up these light, hilly lands with seedlings at the expense of many thousands of dollars in order to get them back into timber. It was also pointed out that if well handled the Turtle Mountain Reserve would be in shape in a comparatively few years to supply sufficient timber year by year to keep ten saw-mills of the average Ontario size running in perpetuity, besides supplying the surrounding district with fence posts and cordwood.

The Turtle Mountain lies partly in Canada and partly in the United States, and one thing that has puzzled a good many people is this: Why did not the United States reserve their portion for a National Forest? The Editors of *The Canadian Forestry Journal* therefore wrote to Mr. H. S. Graves, United States Forester, Washington, D. C., asking him if the Forest Service had ever had the district examined and if so, why was it not constituted a National Forest. The reply of Mr. Graves is virtually to this effect; that when the district was examined in 1902 it was found that while it was well suited to form a National Forest

only one twenty-fourth of the area remained Government land. It is therefore fair to assume that had the United States Forest Service been on the ground a little earlier all the Turtle Mountain both north and south of the International Boundary would have been a permanent forest. Mr. Graves letter is as follows:—

Your letter of January 7 is received. I am glad to inform you that a report is on record in this office covering that portion of the Turtle Mountains lying within the State of North Dakota. This report was prepared in 1902 by Mr. J. H. Hatton of the Forest Service. From the report it appears that that portion of the mountains within the United States is similar topographically and in cover to the portion lying in Canada, with which you are familiar. It will probably, therefore, be unnecessary to dwell in detail about the topography as given in the report.

The report indicates that a more or less dense growth of timber and underbrush once covered all of that portion of the Turtle Mountains lying north of Township 161 North and between Ranges 70 to 75 West, excepting the foothills on the south of the mountains and the southern portion of the Indian Reservation.

As a result of fires and cutting, the extent of the heavy green timber was, at the time of the report, confined to about one township, and this was being rapidly removed. The report states that it would be but a matter of five or six years until all the heavy timber would be destroyed or consumed. Reproduction is good on the fire-killed areas. The types consist of oak, popple, ash, birch, elm, willow, box elder, and many varieties of undergrowth.

The need of a forest cover to protect the mountains from erosion is also set forth in the report. The absence of erosion at the time of the report is ascribed to the density of the cover and it is evident that the generally hilly character of the region will render erosion liable should it be removed. No large streams flow from the mountains, however.

The principal industry of the region was wood cutting, as this supplied immediate revenue and resulted in clearings for growing vegetables and small crops. After the clearings had been made wood cutting became a secondary industry.