

The Growth of Forests for Fuel

Potential Value of Local Wood-lots to Economical Supply of Rural Communities

By PROF. W. N. MILLAR

THE intimate relationship that exists between the rural community and the forest and the poorly organized basis of this relationship in Ontario has lately been forced on the writer's attention in a most striking way. After some ten years of almost continuous residence in large cities, broken only by a period of overseas service, the writer recently took up residence once more in a rural community. Five years previous experience of rural life in a pioneer community, dependent largely on the forest for its existence, and drawing almost wholly on the forest for its fuel supply, had engendered in him a conception of the place of the forest in the life of a rural community that was doomed to receive a rude shock when brought into direct personal contact with the reality of forest conditions in rural Ontario.

Fuel Supply Problem

The importance of the fuel supply in the economics of country life needs little elaboration. The maintenance of life itself on a civilized basis in any community dwelling in a rigorous climate is almost as dependent on fuel as on food. When the problem of heating detached farm houses or the widely spaced houses of villages and small towns is studied we find that under existing conditions in rural Ontario, fuel supply looms almost as large as an element in the family budget as does food. But when we examine into the question of what is being done either by public or by private enterprise to provide fuel to rural communities in the most efficient way we find a striking neglect of what appears to the writer to be the really essential factor in the problem.

The means of producing heat for household purposes accessible to urban dwellers include gas, coal, wood, kerosene and electricity. The rural

dweller has no such choice. Gas is unavailable and probably will remain so indefinitely. Electricity is almost as inaccessible and is generally recognized as by no means an economic

The Possible Solution

Were this an inevitable and irremediable condition it might be viewed with philosophic resignation but as we will endeavor to point out



An Ontario farmer's self-perpetuating fuel supply right at his back door. Note how excellently the new growth has sprung up on the side of the fence from which cattle have been debarred

source of heat. Coal and kerosene are available as in the cities, but owing to the scattered nature of the population served, are available generally at slightly higher prices than in neighboring cities. Furthermore so far as Ontario is concerned, both coal and kerosene are derived from a foreign country, are brought over foreign railway lines from great distances and every user of them of necessity devotes a large part of his annual labor to the maintenance of mines and railroad and other agents of production and distribution at a vast distance from his own community, and in this case, in a foreign land.

such is very far from being true and the condition exists largely through lack of intelligent use of obvious resources, neglected simply because of lack of knowledge of the possibilities which they possess.

As contrasts to the situation which the writer now faces, let us consider two previous experiences with the problem of rural fuel supply. For five years prior to 1913 he resided in a small town in the Cœur d'Alene Mountains of Northern Idaho. As with most western towns, the first step in the establishment of this one had been to cut down all the trees and burn over a good deal of the surrounding timberlands. How-