

What Comes of Tree Planting

By Arthur Herbert Richardson

When settlers first came to this continent, they found limitless tracts of forest, waiting to be subdued. Trees were man's common enemy. They only prevented him from reaping the fruit of the soil, and in the competition to subdue the forest, many thousands of acres of land were cleared which were meant only for tree growth. This has been demonstrated in an interesting way throughout many parts of New England. One finds there to-day more forested land than there was fifty years ago. The reason for this is that when the Western States were being settled the young people left the New England farms for more fertile plains and valleys. Fields once used for crops were seeded by trees, with the result that many fine stands of timber have grown up on land which was meant only for their kind.

Planting 100 years ago

With such a wealth of timber on this side of the ocean, it is scarcely to be wondered at that reforestation has not until recently met with any great sympathy. However, early in the last century there are evidences that men with a wide vision realized what would happen if the exploitation of timber areas was not supplemented by planting. The period between 1820 and 1880 was one of enthusiastic planting of pine in New England. People foresaw that the time would come when White Pine and other species would be gone and it would be necessary to plant if such timber was to be available. Large plantations were set out by private owners and a few corporations. In most cases the young trees were dug up in the woods and planted either at random or in rows 5 to 12 feet apart. In some cases seed beds were made and in others the seed was sown broadcast. At the end of this period it was estimated that there were in Massachusetts alone plantations of White Pine to the extent of 10,000 acres. After this period interest in planting began to decline, chiefly because of the immense supplies of lumber that were being brought from the region of the Great Lakes and also a lack of adequate fire protection in New England. These two factors tended to dampen the enthusiasm for forest planting. It was the pleasure of the writer to visit

some of these older plantations in Massachusetts during the past year and the results observed were very encouraging. I remember talking to the owner of one of these plantations, an old man in his seventies. As we chatted he told me how at one time the site had been occupied by a peach orchard. The peach trees kept dying and as the soil was not the best for crops, his father had set it out with trees. He remembered the date well because it was a half holiday in honor of the completion of the laying of the transatlantic cable and his uncle had come down from Boston to help with the planting. That was in 1858. To-day he has a beautiful stand of White Pine. People often argue — very selfishly — what is the use of planting trees, the one who plants them will never reap the benefit! The foregoing is an answer.

But our chief concern at the present time is our own province of Ontario, and when considering the problems with which we are faced, it is well to compare what other countries have done under similar circumstances. The most noteworthy examples of reforestation are to be found in France, and any country planning to undertake tree planting on a large scale can find in the work done in that country a parallel condition to its own. If it be reforesting on steep, rocky formations for watershed purposes, consider the work done in the Cevennes Mountains; if it be sand dune areas where tons of earth are moved according to the humour of the wind, study the sand dune fixation work on the shores of Gascony, or if it is desired to grow a crop of trees on otherwise unproductive soil, compare the tree planting carried out in the district known as the Landes. It will be interesting to outline briefly reforestation work which has been accomplished in these different areas and to compare the conditions and what might be accomplished on similar areas in Ontario.

The Cevennes Mountains are characterized by steep, rocky slopes that give rise to many torrential water courses. Originally these mountain sides were covered with timber and for many years the French government enforced regulations prohibiting the cutting of trees from such areas. After the French