

Canada's Forestry Conditions and Problems

The Evolution of the Wood-Using Industries, their Importance to the Empire and Some of the Perils with which they are Beset.

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A DETACHED OBSERVER, looking upon the affairs of men, would note the occurrence of definite periods of confidence and fear, boastfulness and humility, periods of enthusiasm and high endeavor, periods of depression and futility. These periods recur quite regularly in cycles; they recur in cycles in the individual's life and in the nation's life. The causes are not well understood: they may be environmental or they may be psychological or both. Too often they may be chiefly psychological. Since the psychology of the industries is largely the psychology of the people concerned in them, they, too, exhibit cycles of buoyance and flaccidity, cycles of prosperity and poverty, cycles of aggressiveness and timidity.

With these general observations in mind, let us turn to our wood-using industries, or rather the sources of supply of raw materials for those industries, the forests, and inquire through what periods the attitude of the people, the national psychology, has passed with regard to them.

In the first place, we are all familiar with the fact that the forests must give way to agriculture. In the early days the pioneer and the forest were enemies because at that time the settler could not get the necessities of life from the forest, but the products of the farm were entirely sufficient for his simple wants. The quickest and easiest way to get rid of the forest was to burn it. What a story it has been! What a record of achievement! When one beholds the wide, rolling uplands of Ontario, the fertile meadows of the St. Lawrence valley, and the green fields in the provinces down by the sea, he is lost in admiration for the sturdy pioneer who destroyed the forest to create the farm. You know ours is a vast country with a small population and, therefore, we are still in the pioneering stage. Within less than 100 miles of Montreal one still finds the settler clearing the forest to make a farm. Within a few miles by rail from any of the large cities of Canada one may find the pioneer development of farms and mine on a large scale. Forest conditions have changed. The value of the forest has increased enormously in the past 100 years but unfortunately the mental attitude of



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the pioneer has not materially changed. A large percentage of the destructive forest fires in Eastern Canada are caused by the carelessness of the settler and prospector. If we include those chargeable to the pioneer railways, then we may say that much the greater portion of the forest devastation is attributable to the pioneer spirit. Our forests suffer grievously from the inertia of a fixed idea.

Forest Conservation Measures

During the early eighties a remarkable wave of enthusiasm for forest conservation swept over Canada and the United States. It took the form of fire protection legislation, tree planting on arbor days, and the establishment of forest plantations. Among the leaders of the movement in Quebec were Sir Henri Joly de Lotbinière and Mr. William Little, whose names public spirited people still revere. At this period there was much discussion of the approaching exhaustion of the timber supply. One writer lamented the fact that the pine logs in the drives would yield deal boards only two feet wide compared with the logs of previous years that would square from two to three feet. Mark the dimensions, those of you who have seen the log drives of recent years! A prominent lumberman predicted that the supply of pine in Quebec would not last more than 25 years. Over 60 million feet were cut in the Pro-

vince in 1920, which shows there is still some pine left. Yet the lumber man was right. Using the standard of his time, his prediction came true. Forty years ago only the largest and finest trees were taken. It apparently never occurred to him that it would ever be profitable to use trees less than two feet in diameter. He couldn't have imagined the use of small pine logs for laths and matches.

During the next period the pendulum of public opinion with regard to the forest resources swung far in the other direction. It was a time of great industrial development and of increasing prosperity. Owing to increasing demand, timber values mounted rapidly. Fortunes were made in timberlands, more often, however, by the speculator than by the actual operator. Yet, great business organizations were built up by sagacious and public spirited men. Their achievements stand high in the annals of Canadian industries. Quite naturally, however, there developed a feeling of over confidence with considerable expansion in the thoracic region. Our forests are illimitable and their supplies inexhaustible. Why worry? All talk of the necessity of husbanding the forest resources is the blank-est nonsense. It was an unpopular thing to say aught to the contrary. Indeed, some of the prominent conservationists of the time were publicly accused of being unpatriotic and of attempting to check the industrial development of the country. Unfortunately, some of these unfounded conceptions have persisted down to the present time, having been kept alive by the unthinking but loquacious politician on the hustings and having been perpetuated even in school textbooks. Let me say, again, that our forest resources have suffered grievously and in the future will suffer still more grievously from the inertia of a fixed idea.

Commissions Appointed

Gradually the reaction from the feeling of over confidence with regard to forest supplies set in. The hinterlands were being explored and the notion that they were densely forested was exploded. The effect of the awful devastation by forest fires on future supplies was slowly soaking into the public conscience. This