



The Forests of British Columbia

Some Fanciful Facts
and Plain Figures
Concerning Tree Resources
of Pacific Coast Province.

--By Irene Todd--



COME with me in fancy to the forests of British Columbia. They are magnificent forests of cedar, fir, cottonwood, spruce, pine, hemlock and balsam that grow here on the Pacific slope in Canada's most westerly province. They are quiet, cool and fragrant—beautiful to behold. They cover almost the entire province save where the mountains raise their heads above the limit of tree growth or where clearings have been made for agriculture or for cities. Therein are firs and cedars, beside which those famous firs and cedars of Lebanon, brought down by old Hiram, King of Tyre, for the building of Solomon's Temple, would seem almost insignificant. And all who enter their stately precincts and walk in quietude among the huge pillars of living timber receive some message and some inspiration.

The artist finds in the various and beautiful groupings of the trees and the peculiar effect of light and shade as the sunlight filters through the swaying branches, scenes of quiet beauty to reproduce on canvas and pass on to the multitude. The dreamer standing among these monarchs of the forest, beside which man seems like a mere pigmy, takes a fond delight in thinking of the wonderful part trees have had in the making of history and literature throughout the world, how often trees of various kinds are mentioned in all literature from Biblical times to the present. He recalls how the oak tree has been woven into the very warp and woof of British history and how certain woods like teak, mahogany and walnut have become famous throughout the world and so on and on, for the subject of trees and timbers is almost inexhaustible. But when the hard-headed business man enters these forests he thinks of the trees, first and foremost, as so much merchantable timber. He hears the axe blows fall, the saw sing, the machinery of the sawmill and pulp plant hum. He sees endless piles of building lumber,

planks, beams, railway ties, telegraph poles, ship-masts, lath and shingles, great bundles of pulp and enormous rolls of paper. All this represents to him millions of dollars in hard, cold cash. Then, because this is a practical age and the artists and dreamers are few, let us deal with our subject from the business man's point of view, from the economic side.

Now, the forests of Canada's Pacific province represent 366,000,000,000 board feet of merchantable timber or approximately one half the saw-timber of the whole Dominion, but the practical man, who knows nothing of the forests immediately asks "What kind of timber is it and what are its uses?" Very well.

The Douglas Fir.

The most valuable tree found on the Pacific Coast is the Douglas Fir, which ranges from the Rocky Mountains to the coast as far north as 51°. It is the giant of the forest, a mighty tree indeed, attaining its finest proportions along the coast where it sometimes towers to a height of 300 feet with a base circumference of 30 to 40 feet. The best trees, however, for commercial purposes run 100 to 150 feet clear of limbs and are from 4 to 8 feet in diameter. For its weight, it is the strongest wood in the world that is obtainable in structural sizes and quantities. While moderately hard, it is easy to work, is straight-grained, tough, resilient and durable. It takes stain well, and can be given a beautiful finish. In color it varies from a straw-yellow to a reddish brown.

The great strength of Douglas Fir along with its comparatively light weight makes it an ideal timber for heavy structural work. The tallest single stick flag pole in the British Empire, which stands in the centre of Kew Gardens, London, England, and is 240 feet high, 48 inches square at the butt and 24 inches at the top, was made from a Douglas Fir from

British Columbia. It is equally valuable indoors and out and is used to a greater extent than any other wood by the sash and door manufacturers of British Columbia. Sawn flat-grained, it shows a beautiful and distinctive figuring making it very attractive and widely used for panelling and other interior finish.

The Red Cedar.

The next tree in importance is the Western Red Cedar. It is the largest of all the cedars, averaging 125 feet in height with a diameter of 4 to 8 feet, but sometimes growing to 200 feet, with a diameter of from 14 to 18 feet. This wood is exceptionally light, soft and of close straight grain, making it easy to work and rendering it remarkably free from warping, shrinking or swelling. The narrow sap wood is white. The heart-wood in mature years is generally a brownish-red, growing deeper and richer with age. Long, long ago, when the Indians of the North Pacific Coast used to carve and erect their famous totem poles, they chose the British Columbia Red Cedar because, while easily worked, they knew it would outlast generations of Indians, and many of the totem poles may still be seen to-day at Alert Bay, Bella-Bella and other Indian villages passed while cruising from Vancouver to Prince Rupert. The Haida Indians of the Queen Charlotte Islands also used this wood for their great war canoes and the qualities which the Red Man found in it, make it the great shingle and siding wood of the North American continent to-day. Western Red Cedar is more widely used for poles than any other wood without preservative treatment, because of its great durability in contact with the damp soil and in all kinds of weather. Its beautiful colouring and its distinctive silky finish render it most effective in beamceiling-wood, while the pleasing aroma of the wood, which however, is distasteful to moths, makes