



Trees taking possession of the prairie north of Oxbow, Saskatchewan. Thirty years ago the land covered by the photograph was totally bare.

The denudation of trees from the prairies has also been ascribed to prairie fires and as the struggle between prairie and forest has been studied in the debatable land just west of the Mississippi, where the prairies have in comparatively recent times been clearly extended by fires, the conclusion has been reached that this element must be given a large place in the accomplishment of the result of formation of prairies. It is found that the border lines between prairie and forest are very irregular. The prairies stretch into the forest land in long tongues in the shapes in which they would occur if caused by fires.

*Our Prairies Once Tree Covered.*

Turning now to Canadian conditions it seems quite clear that in remote geologic time the districts which are now prairie were covered with heavy forest. In southwestern Manitoba and southern Saskatchewan extensive beds of lignite coal are found, and good coal exists throughout Alberta up to and into the Rocky Mountains, and is largely mined. This fact seems to establish definitely that at one time extensive forests existed in the prairie districts, though generally of species of trees not now existing in the territory.

So far as the theory that treelessness results from the country having been an inland sea is concerned it may be pointed out that a great part of southern and central Manitoba was for a long time covered by a great lake, Lake Agassiz, which followed the glacial epoch. But the area which was included in this lake carried the forest which lay along each side of the Assiniboine River and the well wooded district west of Lake Manitoba and around Lake Winnipegosis so that it is not entirely treeless. West of the Pembina Ridge and the Brandon Hills was another lake, Souris Lake, covering what is now south western Manitoba and eastern Saskatchewan.

Thus in a report made in 1859 by Professor H. Y. Hind, Professor of Chemistry and Geology at Trinity College, Toronto, the following statement is made:

"Putting out fire in the prairies is a telegraphic mode of communication frequently resorted to by Indians. Its consequences are seen in the destruction of the forests which once covered an immense area south of the Qu'Appelle and Assiniboine. The aridity of those vast prairies is partly due to this cause. The soil, though light, derives much of its apparent sterility from the annual fires.