

A NATIONAL PROBLEM.

Thoughtful men are beginning to realize that, apart from the mines and the harvests of the sea, the foundation of our material wealth is the soil and the foundation of soil tillage is the forest. The marvellous achievements due to the control of electricity and the relation of water-power to electrical energy bring home to those who study cause and effect the truth that the greatest asset in the material power of a nation in the twentieth century is the forest. Moreover, a survey of history shows that the decline and impoverishment of some of the greatest nations of ancient and modern times can be traced to the destruction of their forests,—Mesopotamia among ancient nations* and Spain among modern being striking examples.

It has been demonstrated that the planting of forests in a treeless country has increased and regulated the rainfall, and it has been proved with equal certainty that the stripping of the trees from a forested region has made the water supply irregular, and made fertile lands arid.

The effect of forest destruction in decreasing the regular flow of rivers has been shown with lamentable consequences in parts of Canada and the United States. For instance, the clearing of the forests from the Alleghany Mountains has reduced those regions to comparative sterility, and has been the direct cause of such fearful calamities as the Johnstown flood, which swept away almost a whole city during the spring freshet which broke up a reservoir. From a like cause, the spring floods which cause frequent disasters and destruction of property in the valleys of the Grand River and Thames River in Ontario, and of the St. Francis and Magog rivers in Quebec, are due to the destruction of the forests on the hills from which the tributaries of those rivers spring.† In those districts, there are men still living who remember streams now completely dry in the summer, which once ran all the year round and furnished power enough to drive mills. The simple reason for such a

*Prof. W. K. Prentice, of Princeton University, recently explored a part of Northern Syria, about forty square miles in extent, and in this district he found the ruins of about 150 ancient towns which flourished from the fourth to the sixth centuries, many of them having from 3,000 to 30,000 inhabitants, and one of them—the famous city of Antioch—having half a million. The hills of this district belong to the chain which furnished the celebrated cedars of Lebanon. Many of these towns are entirely deserted, others occupied by two or three families in squalid dwellings, while Antioch itself has only 30,000. The professor gives the most complete evidence that the ruin of this once wealthy region was brought about by the destruction of the forests, and points to it as a solemn warning to his fellow-countrymen.

†The flood damage along the Ohio River alone has been \$18,000,000 in the past four years.