

## Forestry and Irrigation.

### Practical Work in Conservation of Natural Resources Being Carried on by Civil Servants.

Complaint is often made that the work of government lags behind public opinion. But in the conservation of natural resources the government of Canada is decidedly in advance of the people. The enthusiast or the scientific conservationist may be able to suggest things to be done that are not now done, but even the most advanced thinkers on the subject would find it difficult to propose any new plan which the officials have not in mind to be acted upon just as soon as public sentiment on this Conservation question justifies the necessary expenditure or the educational institutions turn out the trained men needed to carry on the work. An immense work of collection of information is being carried on at government expense through other agencies, but the actual business of saving and improving the natural heritage of the Canadian people is in the hands of officers of the various branches of administrative government. And no organization of the public service is doing more important work in this way than the Forestry and Irrigation Branch of the Department of the Interior.

The offices of this branch are in the Canadian building. There are also branch offices especially in the West, as described in what follows. The branch has been growing in size, but not nearly so rapidly as the work it has to do. Public opinion has been improving with great rapidity on this question of Conservation, and Parliament has responded by giving the branch more territory to work in and more important and difficult things to do. And the Forestry and Irrigation Branch has responded with fresh enthusiasm to every opportunity for added service.

The Branch was established at a time when, so far as the public was

concerned, there was a childlike and unquestioning belief that Canada's forests were—to use the word then universally applied in this connection—"illimitable." Even those who are old enough to have lived through that period of blissful ignorance must make a special effort of memory to recall to mind how complete was the disregard by the public of the plain warnings of experience, voiced by the wise men who foresaw the approaching dearth of timber supplies. It is a fact, however, that even twenty years ago timber was allowed to be wasted in forest fires which would be worth almost untold gold to-day. The conservation of the forest was not, therefore, the first business actively entered upon by the Branch. But there was a crying need of forestry work on the newly-settled and treeless plains of the West. Disjointed and almost wholly unsuccessful attempts had been made to make shelter-belts on many of the farms. Many accepted what they regarded as the inevitable and held the hopeless and helpless belief that trees would not grow in the Canadian West. The Branch has abundantly, even magnificently, proven the contrary.

The trouble was, as, of course, any scientific forester could have pointed out, that the tree-planting in the West suffered from the ignorance and carelessness of those who thought themselves its friends. The wrong trees were planted; trees were planted in the wrong places and in the wrong way. And, perhaps worst of all, the trees, after being planted, were not properly cared for. The Superintendent of Forestry introduced method and science into the work. From the beginning the organization was a good one, but it has