

Building Population by Building Forests

As a Fashioning Factor of the Human Race They are Unexcelled

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In two parts—Part II

SEVERAL indirect influences of the forest are important in the development of the community. Thirty or forty years ago the greater portion of forestry propaganda concerned itself with the beneficial effects of forests upon climate and streamflow. Then followed a period in which it was believed that data in this regard had been misinterpreted and exaggerated. But now the pendulum is beginning to swing toward its original position. The extraordinary devastation that has taken place in the past two decades in which not only the forest has been removed, but in many cases the soil that bore it, has led scientists to re-examine their data with the result that many now believe the forest does exert a beneficial influence upon the humidity of the air in adjacent open areas, that the forest cover regulates drainage and the flow of streams. There are many evidences of this in Eastern Canada in the drying up of wells and streams. These may be transformed from intangible to very tangible influences upon the community, when they modify waterpowers, the navigability of streams and crop production.

Forest Influences are Great

An increasing number of people visit our forests and forest parks each year for recreational purposes. This influence of the forest in giving renewed health and vigor to thousands cannot be measured. And they give more than this. They give a point of view, a philosophy of life that is beyond price to the community. It is the green forest that people love, not the burned and fire scarred. We hear no more common regret among tourists and campers than that such and such lakes have been spoiled for their purposes by forest fires. It seems to be the ultimate fate of most of our forest areas that they shall be burned. If this devastation goes on, the playground function of the forest will largely cease, and the penalty in weakening the moral fiber of the community will be great.

Let us return now to the consideration of the treatment of our forests. The natural forest soils and the intermediate soils in Eastern Canada probably comprise some 150 million acres and they far surpass in extent the purely agricultural soils. Much the greater portion of our timber and pulpwood has come from soils of the above mentioned classes, yet in Ontario at least they are cut under a system designed for agricultural development after the lumberman had finished his work and in no Eastern province is there an adequate provision on the part of the government for the re-establishment of the forest removed by the lumbering operations. The results of such a policy, already being acutely manifest in Eastern Canada, are as inevitable as they are logical.

Adequate Program Needed.

It is far from my intention to belittle the splendid work in forest planting now being carried on by certain pulp and paper companies, nor the magnificent program of reforestation now in operation at the instigation of the Ontario government, nor the results of a fixed diameter limit in cutting operations as enforced by the governments of Quebec and New Brunswick. They are however only subordinate parts of a really adequate and effective forestry program. By an adequate forestry program I mean one that will keep our forest lands continuously productive in terms of commercially valuable trees. An effective forestry program for this country can never entirely depend on the planted product of worn out agricultural soils or of burned out forest soils; its broad foundations must ever lie in and rely upon natural forest soils as maintained in the forest. Forestry to be successful should chiefly concern itself with forests, not with barrens. The fixed diameter limit, in spite of some advantageous aspects, does not insure the regeneration of commercial species — and such regeneration is fundamental in an adequate forestry program.

We can, if we wish, let matters run on under their present momentum until they exhaust themselves. We can calmly watch the passing of spruce as we have watched the passing of white pine as a leading lumber product. We can sit back and take only what nature undirected may give us, just as the farmer might have done and just as the manufacturer might have gone on without improving his processes. We can, of course, use inferior woods. We can furnish our houses with slats sawed from poles and saplings; we can make paper of willow shoots or even of grass. Such arguments, however, are not worthy of Canadians. They indicate a vision on a par with that of the men who forty years ago argued that the Western prairies were little better than deserts and would never support a farming population, or the men who twenty years ago claimed there could be no rich ore deposits in northern Ontario because the rock strata was not the proper kind, or the vision of the men of more recent date who claimed that aircraft could never be successfully used for aerial fire patrol or for forest mapping.

Men of Vision Needed.

No, the arguments of the timid have never prevailed for long in Canadian councils. The history of Canada is largely the history of men of vision who had faith in their vision and worked for its accomplishment unceasingly. It is as true today as in the days of the early French explorers, or in the time of the struggle for responsible government, or the days of the confederation fathers; it is true of those who settled the prairies, who developed the mines, and of those who built up the great lumbering and pulpwood industries.

I feel confident that the same quality of vision will be displayed in the co-operation of the lumbering and pulp and paper interests and the government in bringing about an effective forestry program based upon an adequate regeneration of the commercial species as a result of the