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# a matter of opinion



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**By ROBSON BLACK**

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A first edition of 25,000 copies of "A Matter of Opinion" has been distributed throughout Canada by The Canadian Forestry Association, to settlers, railroad employees, campers, fire rangers, etc. The Canadian Forestry Association is not a Government body, nor affiliated with any special interest. It works for forest conservation through widespread publicity. If you are interested in forests from any angle, write the Secretary and secure helpful and interesting publications.

## THE SETTLER



"I have been a settler in these parts for seven years. When I came first, my neighbors told me the quicker we cleared off the forest hereabouts the better for everybody concerned. So clearing fires were the order of the day, and it didn't matter much whether we started them in drought or in windy weather either. If five

acres were set ablaze, as like as not before the week was done a hundred acres went up in smoke. No supervision by the Government rangers, d'ye see, and fires became a sort of free-for-all. Sometimes, we burned down our neighbors' shacks and barns, and nearly always, of course, we burned off the best top soil from the land along with the trees. But we argued that with an uncertain profit for our pulpwood and timber and counting in the hard work and the time and all that, the trees were just so much excess baggage on useful ground, and the sooner they disappeared by the smoke route the better.

"But one afternoon I began to think it all over and this is about how I figured it. Most farms contain a ridge of gravelly, rocky or sandy ground or a piece of swamp

where trees and trees alone can grow. That's the one likely spot for a woodlot that will give a man his fence posts, his fuel and small timber of all sorts. Just for the sake of hustling the timber into the bonfire and getting the land clear for crops, wouldn't it be better to do the burning with some thought for the future woodlot and some decent care for the big rocky territory nearby that can grow trees and nothing but trees?

"If I could bring a few of my neighbor settlers down to townships in old Ontario where woodlots no longer exist, I think the farmer occupying that land could tell them enough in ten minutes to persuade them to save a piece of their homesteads for the wood supply.

"But there's a bigger end to the argument. I figure that as sixty per cent of the whole of Canada will grow only forest crops with profit, our district, like other Canadian districts, ought to have saw-mills, maybe pulp mills, scattered all through the forest land of this region, with villages of workmen and their families located around them so as to give us an easy market for our farm crops. You'll find it that way in lots of places in Canada, where the lumberman, the pulpwood buyer, and the settler work hand in hand, every man helping the other to make a living. There's room in this big country for everybody. If fisheries and mining forge ahead, farming and manufacturing have got to flourish too. We're all in the one boat and ought to keep stroke.

“Well, as I say, these things kept turning over in my mind and I mentioned them to two or three progressive neighbors. Next meeting of the Farmers’ Institute I brought the subject up for discussion and I can’t say the members were unanimous one way or the other. We let the thing drop, but every few months I revived it and started circulating literature about ‘forest conservation.’ To make an uphill story short, in two years I had so many supporters in our district that we drew up a petition and asked the provincial authorities to give us a first-class fire ranger to see that no man set out his clearing fires without supervision, and to make a regular patrol of the nearby timber lands. We got the ranger all right, and he knew his business. He talked forest protection everywhere he went, and gave a hand cheerfully to help a man burn over his clearing with the least possible risk to his neighbor’s property. Today we would no more burn down standing timber through carelessness than we would let a herd of cattle into a field of young corn. It’s all in the way you look at things. If a settler looks at timber as his enemy, he burns it; as his friend, he protects it.

“Think the thing over! Do your thinking by yourself and I’ll guarantee you’ll come out at the friendly end, same as I did.”

## THE CAMPER



It was early morning on Lake Golden. The air slowly surrendered its chilliness under the lengthening rays of the sun. The teapot sputtered over the coals, and bacon flavors filtered gratefully to the nostrils. The Old Veteran squatted himself comfortably on a granite boulder and nodded toward the fire.

"Boys," he said, "there don't look to be anything dangerous in a little bunch of coals, does there?"

"Not this side of a powder factory," chipped in the Youngster.

The Old Veteran tapped his pipe bowl significantly: "Some day we're going to have an argument about which is the best spot to trifle with fire—a powder factory or a forest, and I think the forest will come last. One advantage about the powder factory is that you know the worst right off. But in the forest, you may walk away for days and have the fire of your own making overtake you."

"That doesn't sound reasonable," the Youngster broke in.

"And it won't," agreed the Veteran, "until some time you start a camp fire in a bog

or on pine needles and after a week's absence come face to face with your own fire in the shape of a blackened township. There's lots of surprises in store for you, my lad. I have known camp fires to burrow into a boggy soil, although doused with many pails of water, and remain there for two weeks, travelling underground until they came in contact with the dry duff of a fine old pinery, then to dart upward and turn hundreds of acres into a roaring furnace. The only safe way is never to take chances with a camp fire, never build one except on rocks or gravel and never go away until it is *dead out*. I have followed that rule now for twenty years."

"You certainly make the camp fire responsible for a lot of damage."

"Can't exaggerate it, because I have seen the proofs with my own eyes. I have crossed Canada with parties of geologists and civil engineers and forest engineers and seen so many thousands of acres lying charred and useless, so many rivers and streams dried up from lack of tree life, so many beautiful camping and fishing spots spoiled for all time, that I said to myself, 'Never you become responsible for this sort of crime.' And I believe I have lived up to it."

"But *smoking!*" said the Youngster. "Suppose that I"——

"Suppose that you threw down a lighted cigarette or a burning match alongside the trail, or emptied hot pipe ashes, I should feel like giving you a very good licking. Lighted tobacco and matches are just camp-

fires in concentrated form. They all have the possibilities of another 'Porcupine fire horror,' and for a man to carelessly toss away the beginnings of a conflagration is to brand himself an amateur woodsman and an enemy to society."

By this time we had made away with the bacon and were glorying in the nectar of campfire tea. The Youngster, of course, had finished first, and was lending a hand at striking camp.

Up from the shore came the guide, lugging two pails of water. He emptied them on the small bed of coals and returned for a further supply. Not until the fourth pail had immersed the blackened remnants of the fire did he look contented.

"I see you take no chances," remarked the Veteran.

"I too learned my lesson," answered the guide. "If the forests are not kept *green*, there's no hunting and fishing, and no tourists—and the guide's job disappears. This is only self-defence."



## THE BANKER



“The other day a timber limit owner asked me to advance him another fifty thousand dollars.

“‘What does your insurance on the limits amount to?’ said I.

“Insurance?” he replied, ‘what do you mean by insurance?’

“Fire protection—the simple precaution against destroying the collateral for this loan of fifty thousand dollars.”

The limit holder seemed non-plussed. “This is something new,” he said, “our firm have had good luck with their timber and—”

“Good luck is a term we pay no attention to. Do you sell your finished lumber on the security of good luck, or select a new boiler by tossing a coin? Then why attempt to do business with the bank, or sell stock to your shareholders, without supporting every move on business logic? You insure your buildings and your lumber yards against fire. How much more sensible to insure the standing timber without which you and your mills and your employees and shareholders would go out of business.”

"But we haven't done anything like that since my grandfather first entered the square timber trade at Quebec—sixty years ago."

"Times have changed. Your grandfather's limits were of comparatively little value in the market of that time. He was not bothered with a cordon of settlers about his timber, each settler constituting a distinct fire risk. Railways were few, and prospectors and campers and hunters represented only a petty danger. But new conditions have arisen. The fire risk has multiplied with settlement and transportation development, and the timber is worth protecting today more than at any other time in our history."

The limit holder ventured to protest—something about his having 'some rangers' employed during the fire season.

"And who are they?" said I; "you make your regular workmen take on fire ranging as a *side line*, or pension off some crippled man with a ranger's job. But that is all old-fashioned. Ranging is a business by itself. It needs the best skill, it needs organization and inspection, and the proper tools. Have you got them? If not, I cannot loan money merely on your assurance that Providence will send as much rain this year as last."

My friend left the office without more words. He is a man of shrewd business sense and I was not surprised, therefore, when at the end of a few months, word came that a new co-operative forest protect-

ive association had been formed, with my client as the leading spirit. He had been doing some hard investigating and I am glad to say had finally adopted my view without much modification.

“That was only one instance of a banker’s attitude on up-to-date forest protection. We do not limit our outlook solely by the circumstances of a lumberman’s loan. Waste of natural resources is a blow to the country’s prosperity. You cannot burn a forest in Gaspé and leave the bank manager in Prince Rupert wholly unaffected.”

## THE RAILWAY MAN



“When I first commenced firing out of Homeville twenty years ago, nobody in my acquaintance thought about protecting forests any more than protecting seagulls. Suppose a settler along our lines wanted to windrow his slash against standing timber, do you think he'd look up the law or send a letter to the Govern-

ment for permission? Suppose he wanted to burn on a windy dry day! What happened? He burned. When a hunter in a pine forest broke camp with his campfire blazing, did he set to work and drench it with water? Not according to my recollection. We might call that hunter careless today. But *then*, what he did was force of habit, *everybody's* habit. Who ever heard of putting out campfires, or care with matches or smokes, or being *arrested* for turning the country's timber into charcoal? You see what I mean: public sentiment didn't know and didn't care what was happening to the country's wood supply. You dared not burn down a man's hayrick on penalty of buckshot or the village lockup. But you could play the vandal with a square mile of spruce and not lose your reputation

as a good citizen. The people needed waking up, they needed to set their eyes on the biggest Moving Picture of the day, a Canadian Forest pouring out two hundred millions cash every twelvemonth, and there'd be a stone wall around that "wood mine" stronger than the Government Mint.

"I know how it used to be around Homeville. We couldn't make out who owned the forests, or who got hurt when timber went to smoke. Some of us certainly did feel that the carnival of fires was a shame on the country and I often said to the boys: 'I'll bet my grandson and yours will pay for all this burned timber, sure as fate.' I didn't think then that I would live to put up part of the cash *myself*.

"A few years ago this forest burning business got into the limelight. I remember reading in the papers about the Board of Railway Commissioners at Ottawa laying down a list of regulations. They said they were going to impose them on the railways to make certain of the forests. Three hundred feet on each side of the right-of-way was marked out as a zone, and the railway company was made responsible for the extinguishing of fires starting inside that three hundred feet, unless it could be definitely shown that the fire was not caused by the railway. There were a few other regulations, but the thing I best remember is that most of the railways tackled the idea as if the Government laws were just a reminder of what they owed to themselves. The first thing we knew, the Canadian

Pacific, Canadian Northern, Grand Trunk, Great Northern, and Grand Trunk Pacific had the forest protection business looking mighty serious. They employed special men for forest protection alone, put on patrols in the most dangerous sections, according to the Railway Board's outlines, and ordered the sectionmen and other employees to take up fire prevention and fire fighting whenever the opportunity called them. The use of spark arresters in the front ends of locomotives had been required before, and most of the lines had given this matter a good deal of attention. However, the new regulations tightened up this situation noticeably, and also provided for tighter control of right-of-way burning operations, so that there was less danger of such fires escaping from the company's property and doing damage to outsiders.

"Well, what does it all amount to? I'll tell you what. On all sections of the road, presenting a special fire danger to timber, we follow up freight and passenger trains with motor speeders or velocipedes so that sparks cannot get into the brush or fly into the forest without the patrolman being on the job to put out the fire *at the start*. That's the whole thing in this forest-guarding business, stopping the big fires before they get big. Did I say it was *the whole thing*? I meant it was *the next best thing to preventing fires from ever starting*. In the prevention line we put arresters in the front ends of our engines, and the fireman is not allowed to dump his hot ashes in the

zone of danger. Sectionmen are much more careful than they used to be and very often you will find notices from the company printed on menu cards in the diners, or hung up in the smoking compartments, warning the public against throwing cigar or cigarette butts from the windows or rear platforms. It is surprising how many fires ordinarily laid to engine sparks are caused in this way. The patrolman is busy in more ways than one. He cautions anyone using the right-of-way against carelessness with any form of fire and his presence is a constant advertisement for the conservation policy of the road.

“Of course, all this care is not a matter of sentiment. ‘Burned forests pay no freight rates.’ Settlers don’t come into a charcoal belt, nor do sportsmen or tourists or saw mills or pulp mills.

“When fire passes through timbered country, you don’t find the construction department working double shifts to install freight sidings and passenger stations. No, sir; as I often say to the boys: ‘There’s a thousand lines of revenue from a living forest, but the railway has yet to quote a freight rate on the remnants of repeated fires.’”

# THE POWER ENGINEER



“A chain is no stronger than its weakest link, and a power development system is no stronger than the water supply that turns its turbines. But we cannot stop there. The best hydro proposition in America is just as reliable as the forces that control the water flow, and if those forces are out of hand, the entire undertaking,

from the President in the head office down to the three horse-power consumer in the basement workshop, is likewise out of hand.

“When I talk about controlling stream flow, I mostly mean forests. Some power propositions have to equalize the extremes of flood and drought by storage dams, but storage dams are to a certain extent “engineering crutches” to make up for a natural shortcoming. The million dollar levees on the Mississippi are man’s method of offsetting the effects of stripping the forests from the watersheds of countless streams back on the Ohio and other tributaries. The levees work—when they do work—and at an enormous annual expense, but had a reasonable amount of the original forest growth been left on the northern watersheds, the extent of levee building would have been



considerably reduced and the menace of annual floods less to be feared.

"I do not need to name the Canadian rivers from Coast to Coast—that run to flood during the spring break-up and to drought in midsummer. Every province has them. Whether in British Columbia or Nova Scotia, municipalities and factories and hydro-electric companies face the common difficulty of regulating stream flow so as to avoid dangerous extremes. Floods in Ontario for instance, along such rivers as the Thames, Moira, Credit, and Grand, cause hundreds of thousands of dollars annual loss. Where shall we look for the cause?

"Nature designed the forests on our watersheds to be the bit-and-rein of our streams. You have seen the thick spongy "floor" to a well-canopied woodland. That is Nature's reservoir, designed for surplus waters of the Spring break-up. Destroy this reservoir with fire or careless cutting, and the logic of Nature loses no time in coming into play. Gravity has a clear field. And that spells flood, erosion of hillsides, damaged farmlands, streams out of hand, and hampered power facilities in the industrial towns.

"Should there be, then, no cutting whatever on watershed forests? That would hardly seem reasonable. The rich agricultural lands will be stripped for field crops and their forest cover whether valuable for watershed purposes or not cannot be retained. The needs of agricultural expan-

sion are supreme. Even on non-agricultural forested lands, it is only good economy to permit cutting *under proper regulations* regarding diameter limit. Taking out mature timber or pulpwood need not depreciate the value of a forest for watershed uses, although indiscriminate "skinning" will spell a speedy ruin. What I mean is that a spruce forest can be cut to a 12 inch diameter limit and yet 76.8 per cent. of the *volume* remain in growing condition. In other words, the reservoir properties would be unaffected. Protection against fire is of course most important of all considerations.

"Natural forests perform a service for streams which cannot be measured in dollars. For power purposes we must often supplement with storage dams, for even in the primitive days before tree growth was touched by an axe, the inequalities of flow between Spring and August were often too great to serve the needs of the modern power plant. At the same time, the living forest is a most necessary ally of the storage reservoir. Its functions are much the same and the absence of storage capacity in Nature places that much more burden and expense on artificial devices.

"I have not mentioned the danger to all storage and irrigation works, of the erosion of hillsides due to denuding of tree growth and the consequent silting up of the reservoirs. From that angle as from others forest destruction on watersheds plays the enemy to the power engineer."

## THE FIRE RANGER



“I started fire patrolling four years ago. That does not make me a veteran, but when I recollect how I took my duties then, and how I take them now, it seems like I’ve been long at school and earned my diploma. The first job came my way because the Local Member wanted to do the family a favor. He got the government to

make me a fire ranger. I remember there were a lot of official papers and instructions. But after I started work, it looked as if some one had cut the cables between me and the official end, except for the pay cheque. I reported now and again what routes I had covered, how many miles, what fires I saw and all that. But I seldom saw an inspector or supervisor to check up my reports and lay out my work. Some of our fellows did the duties conscientiously, but I knew plenty more who wore the benches smooth at the flag stations and did their patrolling by proxy. That sort of thing crops up all the time where inspection is not carried out regularly like the boss’s job in a carriage factory. Cutting trails and tacking up fire warning posters were done or undone, according to whether you had a mind

for it. When we saw a fire, we mostly did our best to put it out, although we would have done far better if there had been proper organization like in a company of military engineers.

“But, as I say, I’m working now for a co-operative association of limit holders. I was hired direct by the manager. He didn’t ask if I was on the ‘right side’ of politics or had the recommend of the Local Member. I got the job on merit. The first week I found I was on a new sort of fire-ranging proposition entirely. My inspector laid down my orders. They included daily patrolling, putting up fire warnings along the trails, educating the settlers about their clearing fires and issuing them permits to burn, keeping the telephone lines in order, constructing trails during wet weather, preparing safe places for camp fires for use of fishermen and hunters, and there were other duties that filled up the time to the limit. It wasn’t a case of a string of orders handed out from an office, for if I did not perform each and every duty on schedule the inspector required a good reason. I have seen him dismiss a man on the spot for being absent half a day from his post. That’s what I call discipline, and fire ranging needs it as bad as a locomotive works.

“The association built lookout towers on most of the hill tops and strung telephone lines from the towers down into the valleys and across country, connecting up all the main points of the system and keeping every ranger in touch with his comrades.

“Why we can't have as good fire ranging all over Canada as we have on these limits is hard to understand. There's no special trick in getting good service; any government can get it. The biggest difference I found as between my present job and some others is in organization and inspection. To put on plenty of skilled supervisors does not add to expense but cuts it down. Good equipment, like telephone lines and towers and fire-fighting tools are as necessary here as in the city fire brigades.

“Mark you, I don't say that these co-operative associations are the only people getting their money's worth out of the fire ranging systems. I know one or two provincial forest departments organized along our lines and they certainly are tuning up wonderfully the last couple of years.

“You were asking me what practical good the rangers do. I can't tell you in a two-minute talk. You'll have to come into the woods and see for yourself. But I can say that we put most of our time on *preventing* fires—that is, in educating and warning the people of the district against carelessness. But we also do considerable fire *fighting*. On twelve thousand square miles our men fought eight hundred fires in the last four years and only a very small number have got out of hand and done much damage. Why can't every province in the Dominion produce a record like that?”

## THE TAXPAYER



"I never knew how much red blood there is in Figures until the Council made me Chairman of the Finance Committee down at the City Hall. When a fellow realizes, as I soon did, that every dollar in the local treasury rings a bell in the taxpayer's pocket, he gets an uncanny feeling that tax money belongs to a

different tribe from any other money.

"Last winter I spent a week on the borders of the Temagami Forest Reserve in North Ontario. Two miles from the village a lumber firm were taking out pine logs for their mills in Quebec. I said to the woods superintendent one day: "This business looks like easy money; Nature does all the work and you step in and lift the crop.' And then I began telling him about the hard time I had, running a Finance Committee in a city of fifteen thousand.

"You don't know how much harder it would be," he replied, "if this forest-crop was left unharvested a few years."

"What difference would that make?"

"You are a taxpayer?" I nodded.

"And provincial administration is not paid for direct by municipalities, but by special revenues."

"Quite true."

"Did you know that the Ontario Government takes from \$1,500,00 to \$2,500,000 tolls from the timber every year?"

"I certainly never heard of that."

"And that British Columbia gets \$2,300,000 and over from her lumbermen?"

"Sounds impossible."

"While Quebec is made richer by about \$1,500,000 a year from the same source—the timber."

His knowledge of plain facts had me at a disadvantage.

"New Brunswick collects a cool half-million and more"—

"That much?"

"With about \$400,000 coming to the Dominion Government from Crown forests on the prairies."

He must have noticed my growing interest.

"If the forests were not developed by lumber and pulp and paper mills, all that money—seven and a half millions a year—would have to be collected from taxpayers direct"

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I assure you I went home with the germ of a new idea in my head. For years I had put aside the forests as the property of wealthy corporations. I thought the governments had 'given away' all the country's timber. I was satisfied that the general public had no concern what happened to the big storehouse of wood supplies. Did *you* ever think that way?

Promptly I set to work to learn the truth about these forests of ours, who owned them, who got the money. Now—

No lumberman gets a dollar bill out of a felled tree until he has spent three other dollars for labor and supplies. That is, the workman, together with the food, clothing, hardware and other manufacturers and dealers have three shares in the profits to the lumberman's one. If the man working the limits does not first advance the worker and the supply-man their part of the cash, the woods operations come to a standstill and the whole investment may be thrown away.

Look this over! \$40,000,000 a year are paid out in wages in the making of timber and its manufacture.

Investors have backed Canadian forest industries with over \$260,000,000 of capital.

110,000 men get their livelihood from *living* forests. A Dead Forest means a Dead Paysheet.

Where do these men live? One hundred and fifty of them and their families are in my own little town. Have you seen our cooperage and box mill, the boat works and the saw mill? There are 3500 of them on the payroll of a single firm in Ottawa during an average season. Look over your own town. See what would happen if wood supplies suddenly ceased. Count the mills and the workmen affected. Figure out what wood means to you as fuel, lumber, furniture, railway ties, boats, boxes, flooring,



paper—I cannot begin to count the jobs that a tree performs in an average town.

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You agree with me that Canada must keep the smoke in every possible factory chimney during the next five years. To do that we have got to keep smoke *out of* the timber lands.

A fine lot of business managers! Pointing with pride to 5000 wood-using factories, and shrugging our shoulders when the Fire-Thief threatens to blot out their sole stock of raw materials.

I am no alarmist, but every lumberman, explorer, forest engineer I have met assures me that this carnival of forest fires cannot *continue*. They say, and I believe, that fires have been cutting down our reserve stock at a rate that brings us today face to face with a crisis. Think you we can burn this candle of precious resources at both ends—use up millions of trees yearly for lumber and pulp and other manufactures, and toss even more millions to the flames? Which end had we better retain, the end of Use-and-Profit, or the end of Fire-and-Waste. We cannot keep both. One must *go*.

Those statistics about the wood-using industries make out a case for a Strong Concern, don't they? But the strength, my friend, is likewise the weakness. The foundation of living forests is helpless against fire. They cannot protect themselves. It is up to you and me.

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What would you think if we gradually killed off the cattle that bring Canada

\$37,000,000 worth of butter and cheese every year?

Forest fires threaten to kill wood industries that give us today more than five times the value of all our butter and cheese.

What would you think of flooding the mines of Canada and turning the workmen adrift?

Forest fires are burning out the mainstay of industries pouring forth \$54,000,000 a year in excess of all our mines.

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What, then, can a taxpayer do?

Incorporate this forest protection business as an immediate personal interest.

Don't let your own hands ever become responsible for setting a forest in flames.

Examine your provincial and federal forest guarding systems. Are they dealing squarely with the country's priceless forests? Most of them surely are not. Inform your local members of the Legislature and Commons that you are a Conservationist, that you demand progressive forest administration.

Tell them you believe in a ranger staff of competent men, thoroughly supervised in their field work—and tell them you do *not* believe in turning over the vast trust of forest wealth to a batch of appointees, having no permanence in their jobs, badly inspected and rendering second-class service. Tell them the forests of Canada belong to 1988 as much as to 1916 or 1853.

Rest assured, you speak the only argument worthy of a patriot.

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