

HISTORY OF FORESTRY—ITS IMPORTANCE—NEBRASKA'S DUTY TO HERSELF.

The antiquity of the axe and the custom of destroying forests are established in the lxxvi. Psalm, the 5th verse thereof declaring, "A man was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees." But that was in a ruder age than this and before the intellectual developments of the race comprehended its duty to posterity. The orient—all the holy land—where civilization passed its infancy, was denuded of its forests by succeeding generations who "lifted up axes upon the thick trees" and gave no heed to those who should follow in the endless procession of existence. And thus they who "lifted up axes upon the thick trees" in those far-off times, and planted no forests in the place of those they destroyed, established the desolation, infertility, and dreary wastes which make the land, that then flowed with milk and honey, an inhospitable desert. Modern nations, however, have begun to learn the lesson taught by those ancient axemen. And the conservation of forests began in Switzerland as early as 1314 in the canton of Zurich, when foresters were forbidden to "fell, raft or sell wood from the Sihlwald." Other cantons issued similar decrees, until March 24, 1876, when the necessity for action by the federal government became so obvious that it took charge of all the forests of all the cantons of the republic, which covered the mountains.

The forestry legislation of Switzerland is better suited to our own than that of any other European country. It can be emulated in the United States with more facility than can that of France, Germany, or Austria. In this article it is not desirable to give details of Swiss legislation for the conservation of forests, and for the encouragement of arboriculture, but merely to call attention to the fact that it is perhaps the best from which to model the legislation which Americans can not too speedily enact for their republic. Mr. Secretary Bayard has, very recently, caused to be published by the state department a volume of 320 pages on "Forestry in Europe," which is made up from the reports of American consuls. It is comprehensive, instructive, of inestimable value, and can easily be obtained, no doubt, by application to senators and members of congress. It ought to be in every library in the Northwest.

The United States consumes every day twenty-five thousand acres of timber. Each night we retire with twenty-five thousand acres less of forests than the sun gilded with its morning gold.

Our ancestors landed in 1620, axe in hand, and were indeed famous, as they "lifted up axes upon thick trees" and began the denudation of the timber lands of the continent. But they planted no forests. During the last thirty years, however, the importance of silviculture

has begun to attract attention and to compel respect. The vast plains stretching in treelessness from the Missouri river to the foothills of the Rocky mountains have with mute persuasiveness pleaded for the orchards and groves which can alone embellish and render attractive the homes of civilization. And the pioneers of Nebraska have been the first and foremost forest planters of all Americans in responding affirmatively to the demands of their environments. No other state in the Union has planted so many trees for each of its inhabitants as Nebraska. Within this commonwealth there are now growing nearly seven hundred thousand acres of orchards and forests. Each year the anniversary of Arbor Day is observed with more and more well-directed zeal, and each year its beneficent results are more and more practical and beautiful.

But the beginning is only fairly inaugurated, and no man has prescience enough to estimate the full results to climate, to seasons, to the people, which the forests now planted and to be planted during the next twenty years in this state shall develop. There must, however, be something practical instituted by the state by legislation in regard to the forestation of the prairies. The question for the thoughtful citizen, for the man who considers posterity, together with the thought that today's occupiers of the soil determine, in a large degree, the physical surroundings which shall engirt posterity, is:

What Shall the State Do?

This is not a paternal government. The business of the state is to protect life, liberty, and property, nothing more. The state has no money except that taken from the people by taxation. But Nebraska has two million seven hundred and eighty-six thousand five hundred and twenty-seven acres of land in her own right (2,786,527) or did have on December 1, 1886, as shown by the annexed table taken from the report for that year of the state land commissioner:

Those lands should never be sold, but they should be leased and so leased as to compel, under the supervision of the state authorities, the planting to forests by those leasing them of 25 per cent of all of them. Thus the state of Nebraska can provide without the direct outlay of money for at least 500,000 acres of forests, the income from which going to the school fund will be sufficient during the next century to provide free schooling for thousands of children. Besides that which, it may be said, will be furnished otherwise—those five hundred thousand acres of woodland will be just so many never-failing preventives of excessive floods and disastrous drouths. Every forest is in its depth of leaf-mould a store of springs—a laboratory whence clouds are exhaled and showers sent up to be redistributed on the earth. Every forest holds back in its leaf-mould the torrents which otherwise pour in destructive floods across treeless places into swelling streams which carry desolation and death all along their valleys. Now, before the land is sold, before it is too late, Nebraska has it in her power to inaugurate upon her own lands, her school lands, a practical system of forestry whose blessings shall descend in showers upon the remotest generations of those who are to follow us in that short quick march from the cradle to the grave, which we call life.

Now Nebraska can lead in legislation which shall convert parts of her school lands into state forests, and when this state takes that step she will be followed in grand procession by all the prairie states of the Northwest. Let us begin. Let the forestry department of our university discuss the matter and formulate the law for the next legislature.

J. STERLING MORTON,
Arbor Lodge, August 19, 1887.

CLASS	No. acres of all lands 1's d during the years 1885 and 1886.	No. acres of all lands sold at public sale during the years 1885 and 1886.	No. acres of all lands sold at private sale during the yrs. 1885 and 1886.	No. acres of all lands reverted to the state during the years 1885 and 1886.	No. acres of all lands decided by the state during the years 1885 and 1886.	No. acres of all lands confirmed and decided to the state during the years 1885 and 1886.	No. acres of all lands owned by the state Dec. 1, 1886.
Common school.	285728.80						
Agricultural college	9735.56						
University	3406.55						
Normal college.	320						
Saline.	500						
Common school.		11973					
Saline.		1584.12					
Common school.			123141.52				
Agricultural college			11077.19				
University			6408.72				
Normal school.			720				
Common school.				82900.28			
Agricultural college				5540.52			
University				4722.10			
Normal school.				320			
Common school.					35003.84		
Agricultural college					480		
University					480		
Saline.					1584.12		
University						320	
Saline.						639.03	
Common school.							2627031.41
Agricultural college							88000.07
University							44746.08
Normal school.							12481.39
Saline.							12092.26
Penitentiary.							676.71
Total	290810.91	13557.12	141347.43	93542.70	38147.96	959.03	2786527.92