

OUR SPRUCE FORESTS

Must be Saved from the Ravages of Destroying Insects.

SOME ASTONISHING DISCOVERIES

In the Forests of West Virginia—A Million and a Half Dollars Worth of Trees Dead—Steps to Stop the Destruction—It is Possible to Do It. An Important Bulletin on the Subject.

Bulletin No. 17, of the West Virginia Agricultural Experiment Station at Morgantown, just issued, is a preliminary report on black spruce, by A. D. Hopkins, entomologist, and is one of the most important documents yet published by the station. When it is considered that the spruce forests of West Virginia exceed 500,000 acres, covering over 800 square miles of territory, its importance to landowners and lumbermen may be realized. The document deals with the terrible destruction of our spruce forests by insects and gives the results of personal observations and investigation by the officers of the station. From the report the INTELLIGENCER makes the following interesting extracts:

While passing through Randolph county on our journey of observation and collection in July, we first learned of the destruction of the spruce timber in that section of the State; the cause of which no one seemed to know; evidently some disease or insect attack was threatening the spruce forests with total destruction. On returning to the station and reporting the fact, a special trip was ordered. Accordingly on August 25th to August 28th, inclusive, a journey was made in company with the botanist of the station by rail and stage, into the spruce forests of Cheat mountains at a point called Winchester, on Shafer's Fork of Cheat river in Randolph county, for the purpose of making a special investigation of the unhealthy and dying condition of the black spruce timber in that region.

A portion of this forest was passed through on the West Virginia Central railroad in Tucker county on the 25th, where great numbers of dead spruce trees were noted, and where extensive saw mills were at work converting millions of feet into lumber. We arrived at Elkens, the terminus of this railroad, late at night on the 26th. On the afternoon of the next day we proceeded to Huttonsville by stage, where we remained on account of rain and floods until the morning of the 28th.

THOUSANDS OF ACRES RUINED. Proceeding again by stage on the Staunton pike, we entered the forests in which the investigations were to be conducted, eleven miles from Huttonsville, at an altitude of 3,425 feet. The timber here along the road had been cut and converted into lumber; this cutting, however, only extended a short distance, after which we entered the forest in its natural state. Passing through this some three or four miles it was noted that over half the timber along the road was dead and in all stages of decay. At one place along this road our driver pointed out the site of the first saw mill there by the soldiers during the late war for the purpose of sawing lumber for their winter camp; beyond this, we came to the battle field of Cheat Mountain, a clear and open spot on top of the mountain. Here an extended view was had of the Cheat mountains extending on all sides with the blue Alleghenies beyond. Thousands upon thousands of acres of what must have once been a magnificent black-green forest of living spruce, was now viewed as an immense waste of dead and decaying trees, presenting a desolate and dreary landscape. Viewing this, we began to realize the destruction of this valuable timber, and how powerless man would be in an effort to apply a remedy for such a wide spread attack. From this point, the descent of the mountain was commenced, and Winchester or Cheat bridge—our destination—was soon reached; a postoffice, a store and a logger's camp is located here, where forty-five to fifty men and ten teams are employed by a Michigan firm to cut spruce logs, of which about ten million feet are run out each year. Seventy-five thousand acres of it being leased to the Sportmen's Association of Cheat Mountains, the famous club house of this association is located about a mile and a half above the bridge. These are the only habitations along the river for a distance of fifty miles. The altitude of the river is 4,310 feet.

A DISCOVERY. The next morning a hatchet was procured and the investigation commenced on the first dead tree found, a vigorous application of the hatchet revealing at the first stroke evidence of serious insect attack, which upon further search was found to be the work of Scolytidae bark and timber beetles, species of which were known to have destroyed extensive forests in Germany, France, Canada and New England, hence possibly the cause of the great destruction that had been going on in this region. Convincing proof, however, must be found in a tree that was dying from such an attack. None being seen, a careful search was then commenced. In tramping through the forest, over rocks and logs, and tangled laurel thickets, we were forcibly impressed by the fascinating scene that surrounded us. The timber is almost entirely spruce and in all stages of growth. The soil (?) is one continued pile of boulders and rocks covered by a dense growth of club and other large growing mosses which concealed treacherous holes in which we would sometimes sink to our knees or waists, making, away from the regular roads and paths, both difficult and dangerous. On this damp, moss-covered, rocky surface, the spruce grows, their roots extending down through the crevices where they find abundant moisture in the ever running waters of thousands of mountain springs. Years ago the forest was called by travelers the "Shades of Death," suggested perhaps by the dense black foliage of the spruce and the thick undergrowth of laurel, where old, prostrate and decaying trees were seen frequently three and four deep, covered by a thick, damp mantle of moss, in which other vegetation attempting to grow would soon fade and die. As we view the destruction that had been going on here among the trees within the last few years, we see that in reality a shadow of death had passed over this region, the cause of which it was now our duty, if possible, to determine. Although the dead trees on every side bore abundant evidence that the timber had been killed by insects, no trees could be found actually dying from such effect until we reached the top of a mountain where the loggers were at work; here the object of our search was found, being a small tree about eight inches in diameter not yet entirely dead. Procuring an ax the tree was felled, and abundant and convincing proof of the

cause of its death was found when a portion of the bark was removed, revealing hundreds of tiny insects which had mined through the bark in all directions, checking the flow of sap, thus causing the death of the tree. Beetles were also found in the green bark and sap wood. The men, who were watching the operation with evident curiosity and interest, admitted that they were convinced, and expressed wonder that they had never discovered the fact.

FURTHER SEARCH. Further search was made for dying trees and a number of others were found, where swarms of small gnats were observed flying around the trees and alighting on the bark. Supposing these to be parasites careful search was made in the bark, where the same insects were found in the mines of the bark borers, on which they had evidently been feeding. Several other species of insects were also found feeding on these bark borers. We had thus found the possible and evident cause of the timber dying, and the probable natural remedy which had checked this cause and prevented further destruction. Much, however, remains to be studied out before convincing proof can be had as to which species should be changed with their death, and which should have the credit for the better condition of the forest. These trees were again visited on September 1, the bark carefully examined and sections of the trees cut and sent to the station for further study. On returning to the station these sections were placed in large cylindrical glass jars, the mouths of which were covered with coarse muslin secured by rubber bands. I have thus been able to note the insects which have since emerged from the sections. It is hoped and believed that with a further knowledge of the parasites of the spruce Scolytidae and their habits, that they may be successfully introduced into forests where the trees are just commencing to die and thus prevent a wholesale destruction of the timber.

EXTENT AND DISTRIBUTION. Valuable information in regard to the extent of the forests was obtained from Col. E. Hutton, who is an extensive land owner and dealer and who is thoroughly acquainted with the land and timber of the mountain regions in this section of the State. According to his estimate the spruce forests are distributed as follows:

- Randolph county—15,000 acres on Elk and Gauley waters; 120,000 acres on Cheat river waters; 5,000 acres on Mill creek; 500 acres on Elk mountain.
Pocahontas county—20,000 acres on Shafer's Fork of Cheat; 100,000 acres on the head of Greenbrier; 100,000 acres on Gauley and Elk head waters.
Tucker county—50,000 acres on Cheat waters.
Mineral county—25,000 acres.
Greenbrier county—33,400 acres by actual survey, on Cherry Tree river, making a total of nearly 500,000 acres, or about 800 square miles of spruce forest. He thinks the actual amount will go over rather than under this estimate. His estimate that there were 25,000 acres in Greenbrier county, was proved by actual survey to exceed that amount over 8,000 acres.

EXTENT OF THE DAMAGE. Colonel Hutton stated that about seventy-five per cent of 170,000 acres on Cheat waters and ten per cent of 140,000 acres on Gauley and Elk waters were dead. S. L. Reger, of Philippi, stated that two-thirds of the 100,000 acres on Cheat waters was dead. From my own observations I should judge that forty per cent of the trees were dead of the 15,000 to 20,000 acres near Cheat bridge. Colonel Hutton's estimates are probably as near correct as it is possible to get them. From these we judge that at least \$1,500,000 worth of timber is now dead in the spruce forests of West Virginia.

STATEMENT OF MR. GEORGE STEEL, of Winchester, W. Va., foreman of an extensive logger's camp: "I have been here three years. We keep on an average 45 men and 10 teams. We went and run into the river about ten million feet of logs each year. We have been cutting these dead trees right along, and I cannot see much difference as to decay. The dead trees that we are cutting now will make very good lumber, and it is my belief that they will be good for lumber for at least three years. No large trees have died in this locality to my knowledge since I have been here."

On visiting the extensive saw mill belonging to the same company located at the mouth of Cheat river, the following statements were obtained from Mr. Kysor, superintendent of the mill: "The first logs we sawed here was in August, 1889, about 200,000 feet of which was felled in 1874 and 1885, only about 5 per cent being discarded or thrown into the slab pile. The logs from trees of this cutting that were dead when felled made third-class lumber. The logs sawed last spring were from trees cut all the way from first to third-class lumber; a much less per cent being discarded in this last sawing than in the first. There is now in the yard out of 3,000,000 feet sawed; 2,000,000 feet of first-class lumber and above, 700,000 feet of second-class lumber (piece stuff and weatherboarding) and 100,000 feet of third-class lumber. This lumber sells for \$8 per thousand, and we sell more of it in proportion than we do of first and seconds."

PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS. From a careful examination of the trees in the healthy and affected districts and of the stumps and tops in cuttings of 1861 and 1884-1890, a tolerably correct idea of the durability of the timber was formed, from which, I should judge that where these affected tracts are accessible to a railroad or stream large enough to float out logs, that this timber may be profitably worked within eight years after it dies. When it is considered that the scarcity of spruce and other timber of the world is becoming an alarming matter, the saving of a portion of the immense amount of timber which is now dead should certainly receive the universal attention of foresters and others who are interested in the preservation of the great forests of West Virginia, for practically every dead tree converted into lumber or pulp ere it decays saves its value.

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PIG IRON PRODUCTION

For the First Half of the Year Shows a Marked Reduction.

PHILADELPHIA, Pa., July 22.—The bulletin of the American Iron and Steel Association contains the exact figures of the production of pig iron in the United States in the first half of 1891. The total production was 3,371,925 gross tons, against 4,500,513 gross tons in the first half of 1890, a decrease of 1,888,588 gross tons, or 26 per cent. Our production of pig iron in the two halves of 1890 did not greatly vary, so that it is not necessary to make a comparison with the last half of that year. The decline in our production of pig iron in the first six months of 1891 affected the pig iron producing States very unequally. Some States actually increased their production in the first half of 1891 as compared with the first half of 1890. The States which increased their production were Massachusetts, Connecticut, Georgia, Texas, Michigan and Colorado. Four of these States produce only charcoal pig iron. The production of Pennsylvania was reduced 436,304 net tons; Ohio 237,508 tons, and West Virginia 42,032 tons. The reduction in anthracite and mixed anthracite and coke pig iron in the first half of 1891 was 17.3 per cent; in un-mixed coke and raw bituminous pig iron 30.8 per cent and in charcoal pig iron 6 per cent. The reduction in bessemer pig iron was 32.8 per cent. The total quantity of unsoft pig iron stocks which were in the hands of makers or their agents on June 30 last, and which were not intended for the consumption of the manufacturers, was 495,102 net tons against 681,002 net tons on the 31st of December last, a decline of 185,890 net tons. These figures cover the increased production of June in the Shanago and Mahoning valleys. On June 30, 1892, there were 295 furnaces in blast in the whole country against 311 in blast December 31, 1891. On June 30, 1890, there were 339 furnaces in blast, or 44 more than on the 30th of June last. The figures showing our production of pig iron in the first half of 1891 indicate a far greater reaction in this leading branch of our iron and steel industries than has ever before occurred. Even the reaction following the panic of 1873 was relatively not anywhere near so severe as that which has just taken place. In the same year in which that panic occurred our production of pig iron reached its maximum of 2,560,963 gross tons.

Negro Boy Lynched. HENDERSON, TEXAS, July 22.—A negro named William Johnson, aged seventeen years, was taken out of the county jail yesterday morning by an armed mob who overpowered the jailor, getting possession of the keys and securing their victim. They very quietly took him to a tree near the public square and swung him into eternity.

Fatal Quarrel. LOUISVILLE, Ky., July 22.—Near La Grange last night Milton Ferguson shot and killed C. Williams. Williams had been fined for being drunk and Ferguson and other friends paid his fine. They started home together and quarrelled over a horse trade. Williams tried to shoot Ferguson, but Ferguson shot first.

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