

**FRENCH FOREST  
ORDINANCE OF 1669;  
WITH HISTORICAL SKETCH  
OF FOREST IN FRANCE**

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French Forest Ordinance of 1669; With Historical Sketch of Forest in France by John Croumbie Brown

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**JOHN CROUMBIE BROWN**

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# FRENCH FOREST ORDINANCE

OF 1889;

WITH

HISTORICAL SKETCH OF PREVIOUS TREATMENT  
OF FORESTS IN FRANCE.

COMPILED AND TRANSLATED BY

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PART I.

TREATMENT OF FORESTS IN FRANCE, PREVIOUS TO THE  
ISSUE OF THE FOREST ORDINANCE OF 1669.

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CHAPTER I.

EARLY HISTORY OF FORESTS, FOREST TREATMENT, AND  
FOREST LEGISLATION IN FRANCE.

IN M. Cezanne's *Suite* to the *Etude sur les Torrents des Alps* I find an historical sketch of the *Deboisement* of France, or destructions of woods and forests, which have rendered necessary the *Reboisement* of the mountains as a means of arresting and preventing the disastrous consequences and effects of torrents, in which he thus speaks of the Forests of France in prehistoric times :—

'At the beginning of the stone period of history, when the first human families commenced settling along the shores of France, what proportion of the whole superficies of France was that which was occupied by forests? What was this proportion of the superficies occupied by forests

at, and for some time subsequent to, the great migrations of the Aryan race, the different streams of which traversed and peopled Europe? What, again, was it in the times when Gaul, then populous, overflowed upon Italy, with Bellorese and Brennus, and hurled its adventurous bands as far as Greece and Asia Minor? Was it three-fourths? was it nine-tenths? This will never be known!

But again he writes in the same connection:—

‘If we would represent to ourselves Gaul as she was in the days of Cæsar, we must picture it as covered with sombre forests, broken here and there by cultivated clearings, such as still are seen in some parts of Russia and of America. But thereafter the slopes of Provence and of Roussillon were denuded of wood, and stood bare as did Greece, in regard to which Plato, so early as 400 years before the coming of Christ, deplored the destruction of the forest shades of an earlier day. Between the territories of two tribes of Gauls the forest would stretch itself as a natural frontier, which the progress of cultures, of carpentry, of smith work, and of shipbuilding, such as it was, would slowly cut away. But the forest vegetation, still all-powerful, would reign in the mountain regions, would control the terrestrial streams, and would with energy repair such losses, which would be but rare, as the tempest or fire might occasion.

‘From the campaigns of Cæsar dates the commencement of war formally waged against the forests, a war of twenty centuries, which has failed, as we may see, to exhaust itself by a complete extirpation of these forests.

‘The commentaries of Cæsar show us the forests being burned sometimes by the Gauls to arrest the pursuit of them by the Romans, sometimes by the Romans to force the retreat of Vercingétorix.

‘Colonisation followed conquest, and devastation extended the traces of the war; but at that time *deboisement* or the destruction of forests was, if we may say so, *legitimate*; it extended the domain of civilisation at the *expense* of the forests which still preponderated.

'The barbarous Germans who invaded the Empire, accustomed to live in the forest, and worshippers of sylvan deities, had a sympathetic feeling for the forests of Gaul. The Salic Law, the law of the Lombards, protected the forests under pain of fine or forfeiture; and it cost nearly as dear to fell a tree as to fell a man. If the forests of Gaul were diminished by the wars of the Romans the devastations of the fourth and fifth centuries restored to them large spaces lost then to cultivation. So at a later period, after the passage of the Normans and the Saracens, thick forests covered the cantons of the wealthy colonies which had been previously cleared of wood, and there are still found among the pines in some of the woods of Provence stumps of olive trees planted by the ancient Phœnicians.'

Thus far M. Cezanne. Subsequently the settlement of the Normans, or Normands, in France, gave a new aspect to the treatment of the forests; and everything connected therewith has an interest for the student of Forest Science.

On the rise of the Carlovignian dynasty in the middle of the eighth century it extended its dominion to the North till it came into collision with the Scandinavian tribes of Denmark. These maintained their independence, and in a short time thereafter there began piratical expeditions, fitted out by the people living in Denmark, in Norway, and in Sweden. The object of the expeditions undertaken by the Vikings may at first have been robbery and booty, but the ultimate result was their conquering and seizing territories and dominions.

The expeditions fitted out in Sweden seem to have been directed mainly against the Finns, and the Livonians and Estonians, and Russia, in which country their influence had much to do with the civilisation and advancement and influence of the State of Novogorod, which was founded by them. The Danes directed their expeditions more against the southern shores of the Baltic, and the northern shores of the German Ocean, or North Sea, and the north



of France, and England, which in the beginning of the eleventh century was completely overrun by them, and became a united kingdom under Canute the Great. The Scandinavians of Norway directed their expeditions more to the north, and further to the west, to the Faroe Islands, the Shetland Islands, and the Orkneys, whence they spread along the East Coast of Scotland, in the Hebrides, and in Ireland, where, in the twelfth century, kings of the Norwegian race reigned in Dublin until the establishment of the English dominion about the year 1170.

Dr Broch, in a work entitled *Le Royaume de Norvège et le Peuple Norvégien*,\* on whose authority I state these facts, goes on to say:—

‘From Ireland the Norwegian Vikings directed their way towards the coasts of France, combined and mixed with the Danish Vikings come from England and from the Frisian coast, as also with the Swedish Vikings, and devastated those coasts, then under the incapable successors of Charlemagne. By its riches this coast presented to the invaders from the North the most attractive prey. The Frank Monarchy having reached its apogee under Charlemagne, had already begun to decline under his son, Louis the Pious, or Le Debonnaire; and under their successors it became a prey to the scourge of civil discords which ended in the dismemberment of the great empire, and the destruction of all its military forces at the great battle of Fontenailles, on the plains of the Auxerrois, in June 841. It was there that Lothar, followed by the Franks of Austrasia and in part of Neustria, and also those of Aquitains, was conquered by the brothers Louis and Charles, surnamed the Bold, after a struggle bloody for both parties. According to Martin, ‘the force of the carnage fell upon the Franks and the Aquitains; and the flower of the Frank race perished in this fearful field of battle. A great many writers, some of them almost contemporaries, others more recent, exaggerating still more

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\* *Christiana*: P. T. Mallin, Rue Carl Johan. Paris: Challamel Aine, Rue Jacob 5.

the terrible extermination of Fontenailles, maintain that the forces of the Franks were so enfeebled, and their warlike spirit so felled by this combat, that from that time forward, far from making conquests over their enemies as they previously had done, they were no longer capable of defending their own frontiers.\*

Two years later, in 843, the Vikings, combined under the terrible Hasting, of whom, beyond this, nothing is known of his country and origin, and ascended, pillaging and devastating, the courses of the Loire and of the Seine. All the coast from the embouchure of the Rhine to the frontiers of Spain, and even the Spanish coast of Galicia, were ravaged with a daring and a cruelty till then unheard of. The Norman Vikings ascended the Loire to Tours, and the Seine to Paris, both of which cities they took and pillaged, together with the rich churches and convents around them.

These expeditions extended already, at this period, to the most southern coast of Spain on the Atlantic; and Seville, which was then in the hands of the Moors, was twice—first in 843, and again in 845—surprised and pillaged by the Norman Vikings.

The largest and richest towns in France—Rouen, Nantes, Tours, and Bordeaux, were retaken many times and pillaged; and at the embouchures of all the great rivers flowing into the Atlantic Ocean the Vikings established fortified encampments, in which at times they wintered, and whence they made most audacious inroads into the very heart of France. The powerless Carolovignian kings sought to purchase deliverance from their attacks with gold; but this poor resource only so far prevented the evil by exposing without covering the feebleness of the kingdom, When any one of the chiefs had received a large sum to keep the peace, he often doubtless returned to his home, or retired to some other country; but his promise was not obligatory on his people, and there were formed of them new bands of invaders under other chiefs.

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\* Henri Martin's *Histoire de France*. 4to edition; tome II., pp. 414 and 415.

'England was in a like manner ravaged by the Danes, who, in the latter half of the ninth century, inundated that country from one end to the other, perpetrating in it the most terrible devastations.

'In the commencement of the tenth century there appeared in the midst of these bands of pirates a chief who consolidated their power in France, and who put a stop at the same time to the most terrible devastations, by giving more of stability and permanence to their influence in the country, and by embracing Christianity. This was the Norwegian Rolf—called Rollo by the French writers—son of the Norwegian jarl Ragnvald, from the south part of Ramsdal. Rolf had been exiled by King Harold of the fine locks, because that, on his return from one of the expeditions he had made on the Norwegian coast, what was called a *strandling*—that is to say, he had carried off cattle for his ships without the consent of those to whom they belonged. Rolf directed his way then towards the west, where he put himself at the head of a large troop of Scandinavian Vikings, and seized the devastated country around the embouchure of the Seine. He established his residence there with Rouen as his principal seat. 'There,' again to quote Martin,\* 'the Normans of the Seine had two very different modes of acting with regard to the Neustrians. Outside the settlement they continued their rapines and their accustomed violence; but within the country which they had appropriated, and which they already called by their name—Northmannie, or Normandy—they conducted themselves as intelligent masters, and no more as blind destroyers; they made the slaves work for them instead of killing them, and they imposed a regular tribute on the traders and peasants who gave themselves to agriculture and commerce. The few and scattered subjects of the Normands were now less unfortunate than the poor people of the other provinces, for the men of the north

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\* Henri Martin, *Histoire de France*. 4to edition, tome II., p. 468.