# LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT AND COUNCIL OF THE MONTREAL BOARD OF TRADE OBJECTING "TO GET RID OF THE TIMBER"

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Letter to the President and Council of the Montreal Board of Trade Objecting "To get rid of the Timber" by William Little



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WILLIAM LITTLE

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Trieste

# LETTER

TO THE

PRESIDENT AND COUNCIL

OF THE

MONTREAL BOARD OF TRADE

OBJECTING

# "To Get Rid of the Timber."

PRESENTED BY

WILLIAM LITTLE,

AT THE MEETING HELD ON

JUNE 10, 1890.

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Montreal:
PRINTED BY JOHN LOVELL & SON.
1890.

*From the American Forestry Association*

(Formerly American Forestry Congress)

I have obtained the following

## ESTIMATES OF FORESTRY INTERESTS

OF THE

# UNITED STATES:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Acres covered with wood growth, or 26 per cent. of total land area | | | 450,000,000 |
| Acres cut over annually | | | 25,000,000 |
| Wood consumed annually: | | | |
| Timber and lumber, cubic feet | | 4,800,000,000 | |
| Railroads | " | 500,000,000 | |
| Mining timber | " | 150,000,000 | |
| Fences | " | 500,000,000 | |
| Export | " | 150,000,000 | |
| Fuel | " | 18,000,000,000 | |
| Total cubic feet | | | 24,000,000,000 |
| Value of wood consumed annually | | | $1,000,000,000 |
| Timber lands belonging to U. S. Government acres | | | 70,000,000 |
| Value of timber reported stolen from public lands during seven years | | | $36,719,935 |
| Amount recovered during same period | | | $478,073 |
| Saw-mill capacity of the U. S, ft. B. M | | | 60,000,000,000 |
| Forest administration of United States Government | | | NONE |

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To which may be added

## FOREST POLICY of the United States and CANADA

## "TO GET RID OF THE TIMBER."

*To the President and Council*

*of the Board of Trade,*

*Montreal,*

GENTLEMEN:

I desire to call your attention to a subject—The Timber Question—which I believe to be of the greatest moment, as affecting every interest in the country, and I am sure all thoughtful persons must view with alarm the decreasing area of our valuable pine and spruce forest lands, the decline in quality of the timber itself, and the indifference with which these facts appear to be considered both by the Government and the general public. With your permission, I will endeavor to point out how disastrous it would be "*To Get Rid of the Timber.*"

I have the honor to be,

Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

WILLIAM LITTLE.

Montreal, June 10, 1890.

# "TO GET RID OF THE TIMBER."

"To Get Rid of the Timber" was the answer sent from the State of Arkansas, two years ago, to the Michigan State Forestry Commission when inquiring about that State's policy respecting its timber!

Yet, strange as it may appear to many, this is the exact answer that would have to be given to-day, if properly replied to by either the Government of the United States or Canada, as whatever policy they have had *(whether of one political party or the other)* has hitherto been simply "to get rid of the timber." The United States parted with its land, having tens of thousands of feet of the finest timber per acre, on exactly the same terms as that having no timber whatever. While Canada sold its land and timber in like manner, and granted timber limits in areas of 50 square miles each and to the extent of thousands of miles at a time, at merely nominal rates, to such of its constituents as might desire this concession, till, at the present moment, it has little of any immediate value left. This being the manner of disposal of such property by the Government, one can readily conceive why it is difficult to create any interest whatever in the preservation of timber property. Moreover, when we consider that only a few years ago the great obstacle to contend against was the size and quantity of timber necessary to be removed, in order to locate a home in the wilderness of trees and to make way for the plough and the reaper, it is not to be wondered that this should be the case; but, now that the railways have spanned the Continent and demonstrated the fact that the country is, on the whole, a prairie, and treeless one, rather than a wooded one—that the timber is peculiar to the coasts, lakes and water courses, while the vast interior is bare of timber—coupled with the further knowledge that this originally vast wooded area, extending from Maine to the Mississippi, can now show "but a few scattered remnants" of its once great wealth of timber, one would naturally expect more intelligent consideration of this important question.

Not so, however; in both countries "to get rid of the timber" is still the first order of the day, and the same policy, or rather want of policy, as regards timber exists—each, in its own way, being equally negligent or indifferent, and equally willing to get rid of the timber. Some slight interest is taken in the subject of forestry—the most momentous question possible as affecting the future welfare of the country—by a few thoughtful persons; but how little effect it has yet had on the consciousness of the general public, or of even our legislatures, is shown, when, in the arrangement of a tariff by the Government of the United States, the direct aim of which is to reduce the revenue

(which is found to be out of all reason in excess of national wants), the duty on timber is not only not removed, but is so hocus-pocussed as to actually increase this duty, as if timber were some noxious thing to be kept out of the country by legislative enactment; when the slightest consideration of the subject would show that a policy of giving a bounty for the import of timber, to any country willing to part with it, would be a far more common-sense one than its restriction by the imposition of duties of any nature whatever, unless wanting "to get rid of the timber;" while the Canadian Government, on its side, also shows how little realization it has of the existing conditions, by actually consenting to remove the slight protective duty of $2 per thousand on pine and $1 per thousand on spruce sawlogs, if the United States Government will reduce the import duty on lumber to $1 per thousand feet—thus exhibiting its too great anxiety to "get rid of the timber"—when a reasonable knowledge of the circumstances would demonstrate that, if an export duty were ever permissible, this is one that has every valid reason for existing, as a measure of self-protection, which should extend not only to sawlogs, but to the manufactured lumber as well. But, yet, the Governments are not wholly to blame in this matter. We are now living under Responsible Governments, which are expected to administer the affairs of the country in accordance with the well understood wishes of the people, and, if the people are apathetic, or careless and indifferent, we can hardly expect members of the House of Representatives at Washington, or the Commons House of Parliament at Ottawa, to make any serious effort in the direction of forest conservation, when they can tell us that they have difficulties enough on their hands to contend with issues about which we are all in earnest, without troubling themselves with questions to which we ourselves seem to give no concern.

But, if we might not hope for a consideration of a subject of such vital importance, from the representative houses of either country, we should look with confidence to the gentlemen of the Senate—who, not being so directly responsible to the people, are thus relieved from the cares and anxieties necessarily connected with representative bodies—for the careful consideration of just such subjects; and one would naturally think, if there ever were a satisfactory reason for the existence of such chambers, it was especially for the discussion of subjects like that now under consideration, and that the question of forestry would be peculiarly suited to and directly within the province of the statesmen of this chamber. But here, too, the same unconcern and indifference appears to exist, and the same willingness "to get rid of the timber."

It is not because this question—the most momentous in its importance that can possibly be conceived as affecting every interest in this country—has not been brought prominently to their notice or that of the public. For years past, my father, and, more recently, myself, have persistently

directed public attention to this subject as one of the gravest character. Memorials have been addressed to the United States Congress and the Canadian Parliament. The question has been fully and ably discussed by intelligent men of both countries; and, notwithstanding the imminently serious condition of the situation is fully confirmed, whenever any investigation has been made; yet the Governments of both countries I was going to say "do nothing." No—worse than that—each does its best "to get rid of the timber"—that of the United States by imposing a restrictive duty on lumber, and that of Canada by lowering the export duty on logs.

The alarming condition is now painfully apparent to the most casual observer, who will contrast the character of the timber manufactured at the present time, running largely into the different grades of culls, with the magnificent black walnut, black cherry, butternut, chestnut, hickory, buttonwood, whitewood, black and white ash, red and white oak, red and white pine, which, when not used for fencing or fuel, were burnt up in the log heaps of Ontario in Canada, and in New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan and Wisconsin in the United States, only a few years ago, and which, when manufactured, the product thereof, ran largely into the grades of selects and clear lumber; and, while this matter is hardly given a thought by any one, we are almost face to face with a problem that must be quickly solved, or disastrous results will surely and speedily follow.

New lines of railway are being built, or extended, into districts, dependent almost entirely on the timber trade for business—the carrying capacity of the Lake marine is being increased at an enormous rate—cities, towns, and villages, depending largely on the lumber industry, are enlarging their borders, as if the supply were inexhaustible. But timber cannot be grown like a crop of corn—its growth is a matter, not of years, but of ages, and when once gone, cannot be restored during the lifetime of those now living, while the really good timber of the north Atlantic and Lake region is not only not inexhaustible, as many suppose, but actually about exhausted.

Beginning at the north Atlantic seaboard, the lumbermen started in to procure that most valuable of all timber, the incomparable white pine; and, after exhausting the original forests of the New England States and coast region, extended their operations through northern New York, Pennsylvania, and Canada, till they finally settled in that paradise of the lumberman, the States of Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota, and here their crusade terminates, for they have now reached the confines; and one can realize with what relentless energy they have pursued their victim, when we consider that the amount of this timber converted into lumber the past season, from this section alone, reached the enormous aggregate of 8,305,833,277 superficial feet (according to the admirable compiled statement of the *Northwestern Lumberman*)—an amount equal to two-thirds of the entire cut of all descriptions of timber in every State in the Union but twenty