



WILD LIFE AND WILDFIRE

BY JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD

America owes a debt of gratitude to this distinguished author for his untiring campaign in the interest of preserving our wild life. In this powerful story of systematic devastation, Mr. Curwood makes a vital contribution to the nation-wide protest against the slow but sure extermination of our big game, following the destruction of our forests under existing laws.

WE Americans are, and have been, a breed of destroyers and of monumental egoists. In the blindness of self-conceit we have reaped, but we have not sown; on the treacherous sands of human "almightiness" we have set ourselves up on pedestals, and we are only now beginning to see our sins and our weaknesses. My own life has been typical of millions whose boyhood begun a generation ago. Both religion and school instilled into me that I was next in place to God, and that all other life, from the life of trees and flowers to that of beasts and birds, was put on earth for my special benefit, and that no other life had a right to exist unless the human egoist saw fit to let it live.

More than once I have been asked to give the fundamental reason for my fight to preserve what remaining wild life and forests we still have in my native State of Michigan—a bitter fight waged against those same elements of political machinery, incompetence, and lack of practical intelligence which have played such deadly parts in the slaughter of natural resources throughout our country—and always my mind has swept back over the tragedy of the last fifteen years to find its answer. While my own state, where I was born and where I have lived for almost forty years, is in my opinion the darkest blot on the map of the American continent, when it comes to the matter of forest destruction; and while I am confident it will take a quarter of a century of intelligence and technical ability to give back to us the wild life which lack of conservation has lost to us in a pitiable fraction

place the present system of political appointments, I am convinced that every true conservationist should put his shoulder to the "national wheel" and pull for the country at large as well as for his local environment, if the ultimate and greater triumph is to be achieved.

While we are slowly but surely awakening to the deadly error of these teachings of our youth, and while the necessity for a proper conservation of the resources which God gave to us in the beginning is becoming a living thought throughout our commonwealth, in our homes, our churches, and our schools, one still cannot feel himself a fighter in the ranks until he or she realizes the awful devastation of the past few years. Our youth did not pass through the grimmest of that tragedy, and millions of boys and girls now in our public schools, our conservationists of tomorrow, must depend upon us for those visions of the past by which they will be guided to the possibilities of the future.

For those who have not seen the great change with their own eyes and who have not been in a position to witness the tragedy of destruction, not only in a local environment, but in a scope covering two-thirds of a continent, my own experience of fifteen years in the open spaces may be of interest, if not of actual value, in showing how swiftly the destruction of our wild life has swept upon us and how quickly we must now act to save it from utter annihilation.

With the beginning of those fifteen years, almost the entire northern half of our continent was one vast

apping' grounds. Fifteen years ago the buffalo were gone, it is true, with the exception of a few survivors in the Athabasca country. In those days I was employed by the Canadian Government as a sort of "last frontier" investigator and explorer, and I had unexcelled opportunities for coming in contact with the wild life between Montreal and the Pacific. On every railroad then running in western Canada the daily recreation of passengers was counting the coyotes and antelopes. The buffalo trails and wallows were then, and even later, plainly visible from the car windows, and over vast areas the prairies were crisscrossed with them. But in the face of this tragedy of the recent passing of the buffalo people marveled at what seemed to be the inexhaustible supply of wild life still left. From the car windows wildfowl could be seen not only in thousands, but in countless

millions. Every log-hole and lake was black with them. One early autumn, when I rode several hundred miles horseback from Medicine Hat to the Caribou Mountains to run down a rumor of buffalo living there, I was not for an hour at a time where I could not hear the thunder of the wings of rising wildfowl. For years I looked upon the tragedy of settlers slaughtering ducks and geese literally by the wagon-load. At Dundern, Saskatchewan, I was the guest of a wealthy rancher when a hunt was planned. There were six of us in the party that visited a lake several miles out in the prairies. Shooting began at dawn. Marksmanship was not necessary, and by the time the evening shoot was over the kill was over six hundred ducks, and filled a wagon. In those days game was slaughtered in this way, cleaned, and placed in ice-houses for winter use.



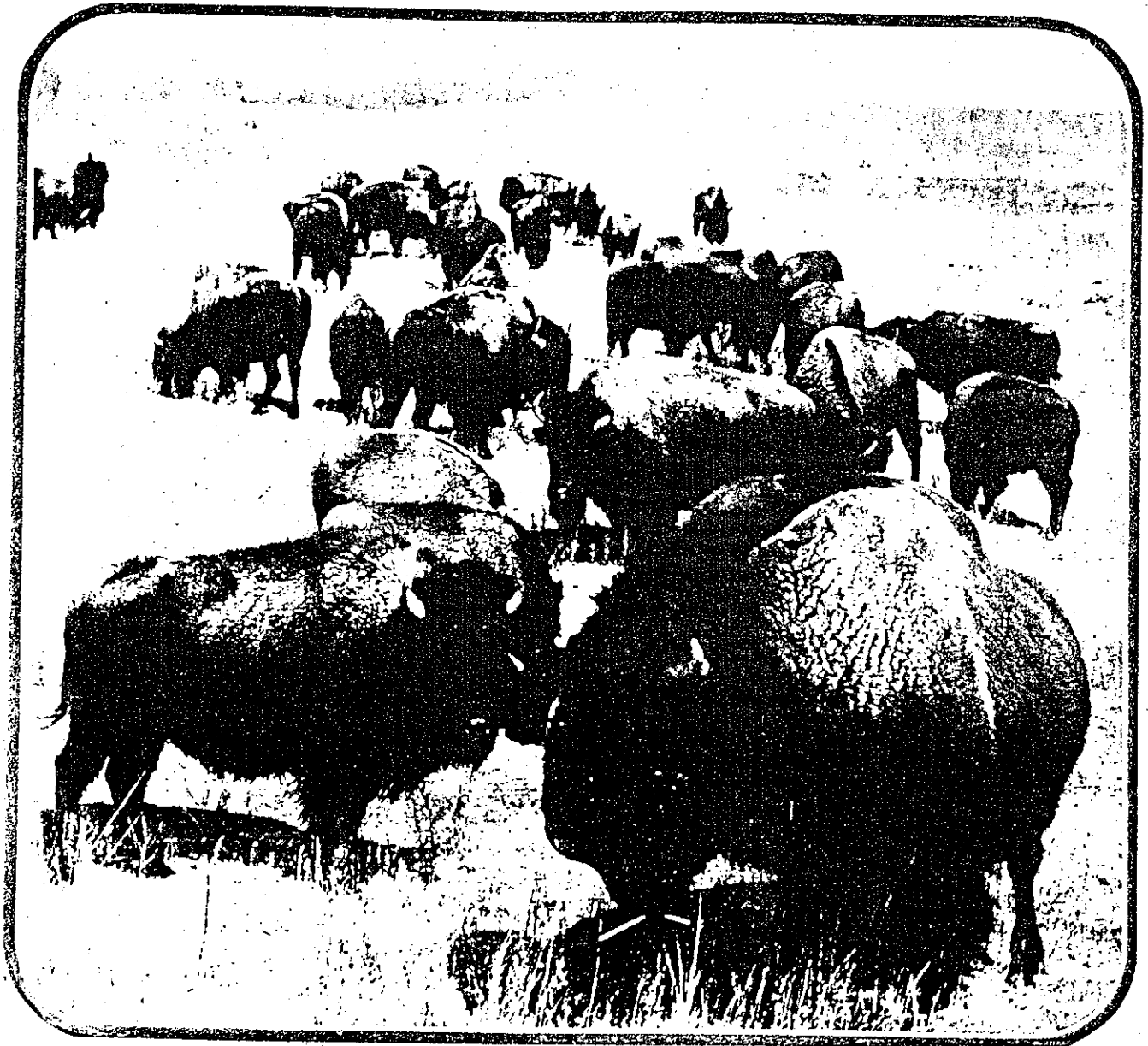
From a painting by Carl Rungius, Courtesy the Biological Survey

THE GREAT ALASKAN MOOSE

Occasionally, in the years that followed, I went over these same tramping grounds. Year by year I watched the going of the wildfowl and the prairie chicken. During a "flight" season of wild geese I have counted as many as thirty burning straw-stacks on a single night, around which the slaughterers were gathered to kill the geese that circled low in the illuminations.

The result was appalling. Today, at the end of those few years, if you ride from Winnipeg to the mountains on either the Grand Trunk Pacific or the Canadian Pacific

responsible for this in Canada, just as these same elements have been responsible in our own country. Not only have they "hogged" the wild life of lake and stream and forest, but so long as their own immediate and selfish wants have been filled they have cared but little for the future. They have not made intelligent laws, and when such laws have occasionally been made they have not used the power of their vote to demand an enforcement of them. In almost every instance true conservation, where it has won out at all, has had to ride over rotten politics.



AMERICAN BISON, FORMERLY KING OF THE PLAINS, NOW TO BE FOUND ONLY IN THE GAME PRESERVES *Courtesy of the U. S. Forest Service*

the probability is that you will not see even a coyote. Surely you will not see an antelope. The ponds and lakes once black with wildfowl will occasionally hold a family of ducks or a small flock. There are no wild geese; even prairie chickens create an unusual interest when they are seen. The greatest breeding grounds that North America has ever known, outside of the Arctic tundras, are gone.

The settler and the hunter, together with political stupidity and selfish ambition, have been almost entirely

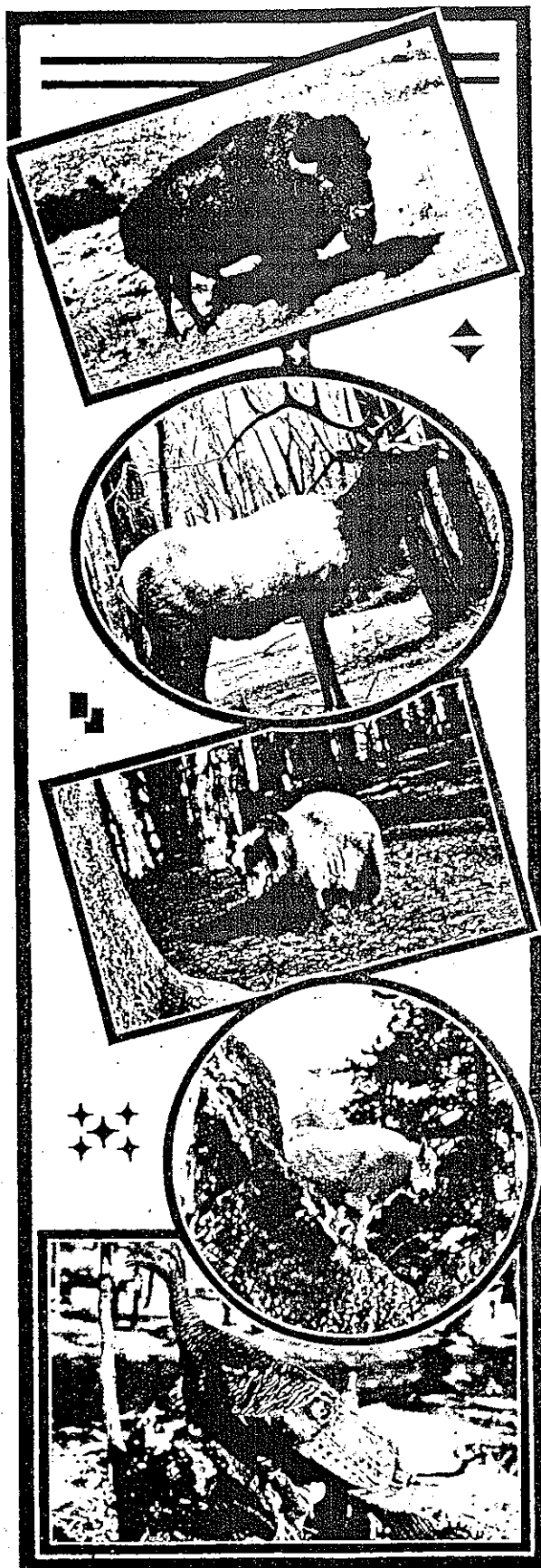
Within these same fifteen years I went ahead of the "line of rail" of the Grand Trunk Pacific, through Yellowhead Pass and the British Columbia mountains. This was before a mile of steel had been laid beyond the prairie foothills, and I found a game paradise which some might consider an exaggeration if I could describe it as it actually existed. Bear, deer, sheep, goat, and caribou literally swarmed in these regions. At one time I counted eleven bears on one mountain slide all visible at the same

time, and I have seen bands of sheep which numbered as high as a hundred. Several times since those days I have gone through these same regions. The so-called "sportsman," with his automatic and his pump-gun, has wrought frightful havoc. Today one must outfit a pack-train and go deep into the mountains for days and weeks at a time to find a single grizzly or sheep, and he is a fortunate hunter if he brings home either. During one season which I spent in the Firepan Mountains gathering material for my "Grizzly King," I saw twenty-seven grizzlies, innumerable blacks, and hosts of other game. On my last trip I spent six weeks and saw three bears.

Still farther north one sees the result of modern-day destruction. Today, even to the Arctic coast, a caribou herd of a thousand head, even in migration, is unusual. All through the northland they have split into smaller bands. Rifles have come in with the white man. The slaughter of the wildfowl life of North America on the prairies of western Canada and our own western states has also sounded the doom of the hoofed beasts. We must remember that the geese and ducks on Lake Superior today were on the Arctic tundras a few weeks ago, and will be in the tropics a few weeks hence. A slaughter in Florida may bring hunger and starvation to the Indian three thousand miles north. There was a time when the Arctic tundras were what the Indians conceive their Happy Hunting Grounds to be. They were the Canadian prairies multiplied ten times; it seemed as though the wild life of the earth gathered there to breed. But the man from Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Topeka, Milwaukee, Detroit, and St. Augustine has robbed even the distant tundras of their life.

In the United States even more than in Canada are we today seeing and feeling the effects of an appalling devastation. My own State of Michigan is an example. The story of its outraged forests and wild life is a tragedy of desecration, of money-lust, of personal selfishness, and political incompetence and stupidity. Michigan is a particularly good state to look at in these last days of forests and wild life simply because of the fact that God intended it to be the greatest water, forest, and wild life paradise on the American continent. No other state was so completely endowed with all things or so richly stored with possibilities at the beginning. Its wild life and forest resources have been worth billions, and had these natural gifts been *harvested* instead of slaughtered, they would be worth billions today. Yet, in this state, never have we had a man technically trained and educated in conservation matters at the head of our conservation affairs. The present Director of our Conservation Department is a man who has been thirty years in politics. Our Secretary of Conservation is a newspaper man. And only a few days ago the dean of American forestry, Prof. Filibert Roth, Professor of Forestry in the University of Michigan, found it necessary to resign from our Conservation Commission because he could no longer fight against the environment which made his lifelong experience and technical worth of no practical value at all.

This system is not the fault of an individual or individuals. It is perfectly legitimate for politicians, newspapermen, railroad engineers, lawyers, preachers, or candlestick-makers, to run the vast natural resources of any state *if the people so will*. They



THE TRAGEDY OF THE PASSING OF OUR BUFFALO THREATENS TO BE CLOSELY FOLLOWED BY THE LOSS OF OUR ELK, BEAR, MOUNTAIN GOATS, GAME, AND OTHER DENIZENS OF THE WILD

cannot be held accountable for the fact that they are not technically skilled forestry men, or that they have not had the long and intensive training, education, and scientific application of study which every other great corporation on earth would demand of those in charge of its resources. The people themselves are at fault. They alone are to blame for not rising in the power of their vote and bringing about a condition where the very best men that money and science can produce are employed as the guardians and care-takers of our forests and wild life, our lakes and streams. Until that time comes, until every governor and every legislature in every state demand the very highest of skill, training, intelligence, and technical ability at the heads of our conservation activities, we must miserably fail.

deer, an animal that has been domesticated for more than fifteen centuries, has been imported into our north woods, where they are cared for and fenced and fed like cattle, one of the finest of all game animals, the black bear, is still killed in our state as "vermin."

During the two years of 1919 and 1920 there were 1,442 forest fires in Michigan, and these fires burned over 620,493 acres of forest land, or *one thousand square miles*. At the ridiculously low rate of \$50 an acre, this means a total loss of over \$30,000,000 in those two years, or \$10 for every man, woman, and child in the state. While our political régime estimates Michigan's forest-fire loss at only \$2,000,000 a year, experts trained in their business have estimated the loss at \$100,000,000 a year. I have split this in two and estimate it at \$50,000,000.



Courtesy the United States Forest Service

A FAMILY ROW—INTERESTING DEVELOPMENTS PROMISED AT ONCE!

The tremendous loss which has occurred throughout the United States because of lack of these things is shown by conditions as they exist in my own State of Michigan. Because of timber-slaughter and forest fires, over one-third of Michigan is virtually bankrupt, paying no more in taxes than the cost of collecting the taxes, unable to build roads and schools, and even unable to provide police protection. Fourteen million acres, or over twenty thousand of our fifty-seven thousand square miles, are idle, barren, and fire-blasted.

In spite of the newspaper propaganda which is always sent out in great volumes from the center of political activities, our wild life has gone rapidly with our forests. Of our two thousand miles of inland waters at least 50 per cent, or one thousand square miles, have been robbed and polluted until they are now what is technically known as "barren." Our grayling is utterly extinct. Our trout streams are going swiftly and are not 20 per cent of what they were a few years ago. While energy and money have been expended in importing and propagating the ring-necked pheasant, a semi-domestic fowl that will forever be impossible as a game-bird, our native partridge has been neglected until pot-hunters, if they were allowed to exist today, would starve to death. And while rein-

These figures for 1919 and 1920 are tragic enough, but in the year 1921 there were 1,028 forest fires in Michigan, or almost as many as in the preceding two years combined.

I have always hunted, have always loved the woods, have lived in them a great deal of my time. The money which carried me through college I earned at trapping. But it is only when I view my experiences of the past few years that I see the tragedy of today in all of its naked horror. With wild life not only going, but almost gone, it seems to me little less than criminal that the people of great commonwealths will still allow politicians to run their conservation affairs. I feel and see the sickening effect of it.

A great corporation that builds automobiles would consider it suicidal to place a plumber or a carpenter at its head. A big hotel would not place its management in the hands of a stone-cutter. Yet the people of a state, the mightiest of all corporations, will see a petty politician, or a butcher, or a mechanical engineer in control of all the forest and wild life resources which God has seen fit to give it. To me this is little less than sacrilege. It is a body blow at the Great Giver of things Himself. It is as senseless as placing a trained forester in command of a

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ship at sea, or a railroad engineer in charge of an electric-lighting plant.

Before success comes to us, politics must go. The people of every state must make their governors and their legislatures see that conservation of forests and wild life is not for the hunter and fisherman alone. Trained men, skilled and intelligent in their professions, must replace those who are utterly unable to cope with the tragedy as it exists today. Ten years from now, five years from now, will be too late. And only *the people* can save us from an utter devastation. Only *the people*, with their power of the ballot, can put their lakes, their streams, and what wild life and forests they have left, into hands capable of caring for them, perpetuating them, and increasing them.

People must come to an understanding of what conservation means. They must be made to realize that human life is absolutely dependent upon wild life and forests. Without these things we would become extinct as a race. If all vegetation, all wild life, and all forests should disappear tomorrow, the human race would become extinct upon the face of the earth within one year. Without wood we would have no agriculture, no manufacture, no commerce. Civilization, as we know it, would come to an end. In the United States today three billion dollars are invested in manufacturing plants where the raw material is wood. *Fourteen million people*, or one-eighth of the total population of the country, are dependent upon these wood-working plants for their livelihoods. Yet within the last five years seven thousand sawmills have been junked in this country because of lack of material.

The hour for action is not ahead of us. *It is here.* Tomorrow will be too late. If every governor in every state realized this today, there would be a wholesale resignation of incompetents throughout the land and their replacement by men who are technically and professionally fitted. Conservation and propagation is a science. It is a life-and-death problem confronting a hundred and twenty million people in the United States. It is not a trivial affair, to be juggled in the hands of politicians or to be guided happen-chance by lucky appointees chosen from any and every walk of life. It is a problem for broad and intelligent minds technically and professionally prepared for the gigantic work in hand—the very men who are now held back, kept out, and seldom employed. And there seems to me to be but one inference. Such men, the very biggest that can be secured for the work, will not prostitute their ability, their training, and their profession by seeking political influence. They cannot swing counties or sections of states. Such men are employed in our colleges and our universities. Upon them we depend for the education of our children and the advancement of science. They have forgotten more about *real* conservation than the conservation departments of all our states will ever know. Yet governors seldom appoint them, legislatures rarely employ them. *Why?*

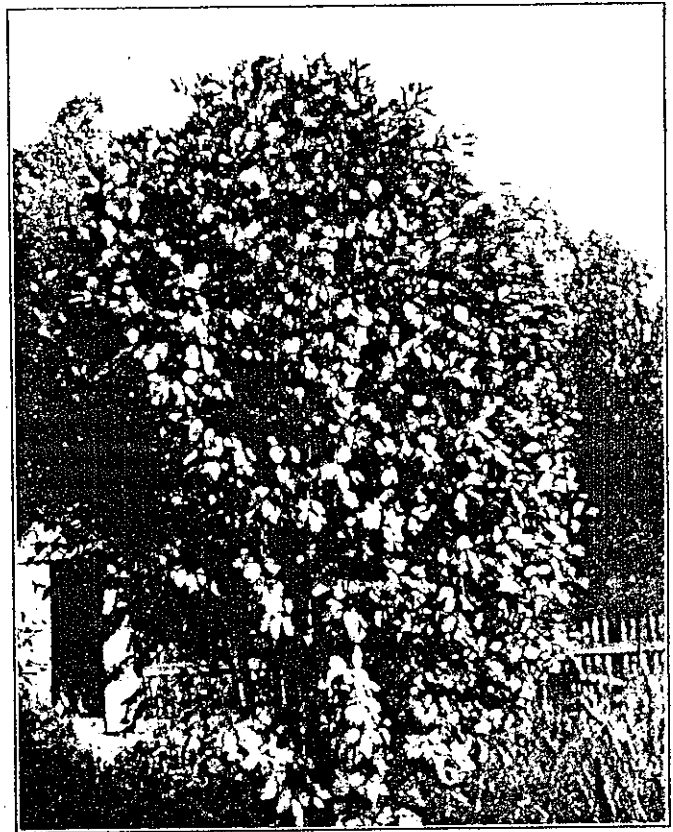
A Cascara Tree in West Virginia

By HU MAXWELL

Recently while traveling through the country in West Virginia, I noticed a peculiar tree standing near a fence. I did not think it was a native tree of the State, so I called at the house near-by and was given permission to examine it more closely.

I was struck by the tree's similarity of appearance to the cascara tree of the Pacific coast, and I was told that the present tree came from seeds which a young man had carried from the State of Washington a few years ago, when he returned from there.

That explained how the tree came to be there. It was undoubtedly the cascara tree, and I think it was the *cascara sagrada*, from which the medicine called cascaxets is made.



THE VISITOR FROM THE FAR WEST

A Cascara Sagrada tree growing from seed brought from the state of Washington and planted by a new fence in West Virginia.

I was interested to find that the valuable medicinal tree of the far western mountains seems perfectly at home in the climate of West Virginia. It is standing at an altitude about 1,690 feet above sea-level. It is associated with the yellow poplar, chestnut, beech, birch, oak, and hemlock.

I never saw a cascara tree in better health, or one putting on more vigorous growth among the Sierra Nevada mountains in California, or in the damp climate of Washington. The tree as it is growing in West Virginia is of a little deeper green than it is in the West, for there it is often of a yellowish cast, particularly in the fall.