

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-66278-0 - The Story of Our Trees: In Twenty-Four Lessons

Margaret M. Gregson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

During your walks in the country you will very likely have seen men with saws and long ropes cutting down trees and carting them away. If you have stood and watched them you will have noticed the skilful way in which they arrange the ropes so that when the tree comes down it falls where they wish it to, and does no damage. You may also have wondered what will become of the tree and to what use it will be put when it is taken away.

When trees are cut down they are usually taken straight to a saw-mill. Here a great saw cuts the trunks up into the planks which are found to be the most convenient form in which to store quantities of wood or to send it to other places. Although nowadays iron has almost entirely taken its place for shipbuilding, wood is still put to such a number of different uses that we should soon not have a tree left in the country if we depended only on our native supplies. Large quantities of the wood used in England are therefore imported from more thickly wooded countries.

In Canada tree felling takes place on an enormous scale. When the trees are cut down they are cut across

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-66278-0 - The Story of Our Trees: In Twenty-Four Lessons

Margaret M. Gregson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

2

Introductory

into great logs and are dragged through the forest by teams of horses until they reach the steep banks of a river. The logs are then let go, and slide down into the river with a mighty splash. Hundreds of these



Fig 1. A Log Chute, Canada.

logs, jostling each other over the rapids, are carried down by the river. Sometimes they get jammed together and can go no further until men, taking their lives in their hands, leap from one log to another breaking up the block. When they reach the saw-mill

Introductory



Fig. 2. Checking timber on the Norwegian Government forest reserve.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-66278-0 - The Story of Our Trees: In Twenty-Four Lessons

Margaret M. Gregson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

they are sawn into planks and are then placed on ships for transport to other countries.

We have now in England only a few forests left, but if we could look back some million years we should see a very different state of things. In those days the country was covered with swampy forests in which ferns and other plants grew together so closely that the weaker ones were often choked out of existence in the struggle. When they fell to the ground they gradually became rotten and other dead plants and leaves fell upon them. Thus, by degrees, thick layers were formed. Very many years passed by, earthquakes and other more gradual changes altered the surface of the earth, so that at last these old layers found themselves right deep down in the earth and became a hard black substance. This is what you know as coal. It is now found in coal mines in the depths of the earth and is dug up to be burnt in our grates. Sometimes in a piece of coal you will see the mark of a fern leaf, or of a piece of stem (Fig. 4). These are almost the only traces left to tell us what those ancient forests once were. If you are ever on a peat moor, look carefully at the black peaty earth. You will see that, even some way below the surface, it is full of little roots and stems of plants. This peat shows a very early stage of decay through which coal very possibly went before reaching the form in which we know it.

After many ages had passed by, England became inhabited by men, and as these inhabitants became more civilized they began to cut down small tracts of forest and to cultivate the land. The larger and fiercer animals that used to range through the country were exterminated and the forests came to be looked upon as hunting

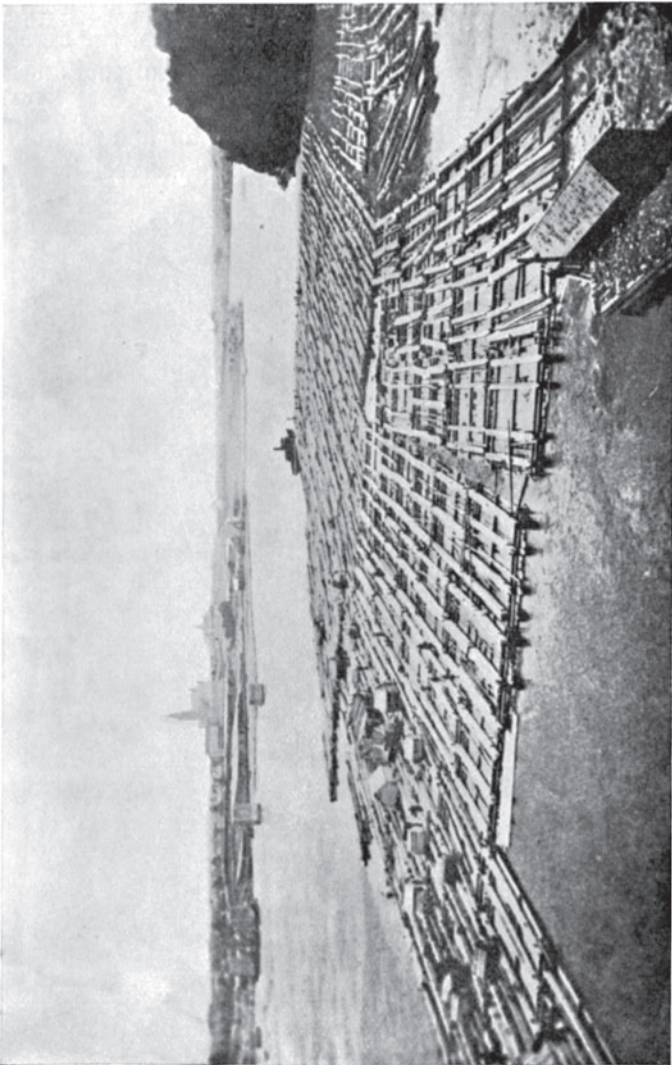


Fig. 3. A Log Raft, Canada.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-66278-0 - The Story of Our Trees: In Twenty-Four Lessons

Margaret M. Gregson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

6

Introductory

grounds for the king and his nobles—as such they were carefully preserved and wherever this was not the case they were looked upon as unfailing supplies of fuel and soon disappeared.

As the power of the people grew greater and that of the Crown less, more and more forest land was reclaimed



Fig. 4. Fern Leaf in Coal shale.

and used for agriculture until only a few Royal forests were left.

It was a great many years before the full value of our English woodlands was recognised, but in recent years many small plantations have been made to

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-66278-0 - The Story of Our Trees: In Twenty-Four Lessons

Margaret M. Gregson

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introductory*

7

provide shelter for crops and for game (pheasants, deer, etc.). Where timber is the chief motive for a plantation the ground should be closely planted with trees that grow tall and straight.

Apart from their utility for timber and for those health-giving properties of which we shall speak in another chapter, trees are valuable to a country for the beauty they give it. Have you ever noticed, as you



Fig. 5. Typical Midland scenery. The river Avon at Evesham.

travelled from one part of England to another, how the differences in the scenery through which you pass are almost entirely due to them? Suppose you have been staying on the coast of Norfolk and you are going back to your home in Devon. You have been on sandy hills, with here and there clumps of Scotch Pine that give the country a rather wild and lonely look. As soon as the Fens are reached the land becomes flat, with silvery willows lining the banks of the winding streams. Then,

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-66278-0 - The Story of Our Trees: In Twenty-Four Lessons

Margaret M. Gregson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

all through the Midlands, you have rich pasture land dotted over with elms, oaks and beeches. This is typical English scenery, and is to be seen nowhere else. In Devonshire the climate is so mild that you will see many trees that will generally only grow in warmer countries—this makes many people who visit this county for the first time say how much they are reminded of the South of France or of Italy.

If instead of going across England you travel up to the North you will perhaps see the Yorkshire or Scotch moors. Here the hills are covered with short purple heather, and, owing to the cold winds, no trees will grow. Until you began to notice it for yourself you would never believe how great a difference trees make to the country. A few years ago one of the magazines published an article illustrated with pictures showing side by side the London parks of which we are so proud and the same parks as they would look shorn of their trees. No one would have taken them for the same places. Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens looked flat uninteresting wastes with no landmarks but broad paths, artificial lakes, and Hyde Park Corner and the Marble Arch towering up at the ends.

The trees of which we have been speaking call up in the mind a picture of something very tall with a thick woody trunk and spreading branches on which green leaves are borne. The mere size is not, however, always a safe test of whether a plant is or is not to be called a tree, as it partly depends on the conditions under which the plant grows. You are accustomed to think of a cabbage as a plant a foot high and of an oak as a tall stout tree. This idea is perfectly true, yet, in the mild climate of Jersey are grown cabbage plants over six

Introductory

9

feet high, with stems so strong and hard that they are made into walking sticks. As for the oak, the Japanese

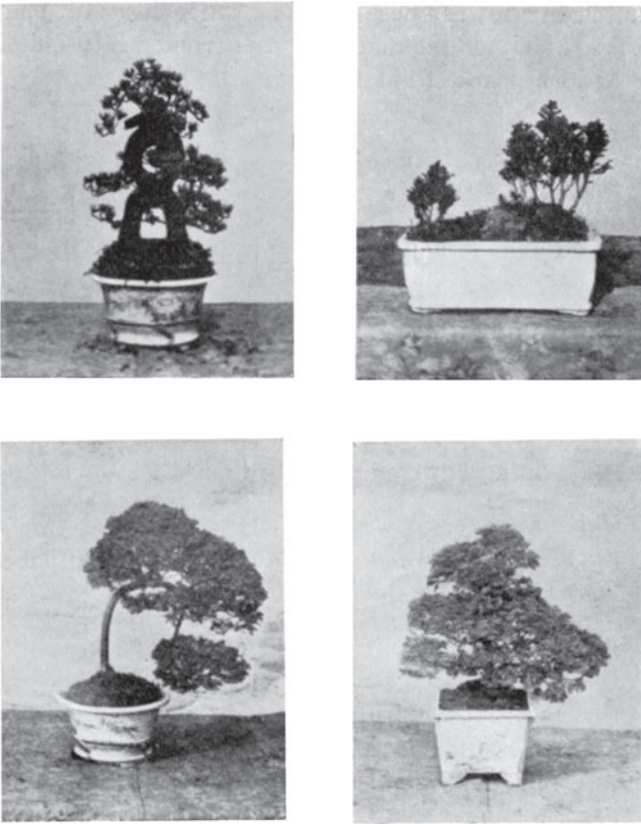


Fig. 6. Japanese Dwarf Trees.

have a way of so pinching back young trees and repeatedly repotting them, that although beautifully

shaped they never grow big. In Japan you may see oaks and cypresses 100 years old and yet small enough to be put upon the dinner table (Fig. 6). Yet, however stunted in growth these trees may be, they still show a thick woody trunk, and it is this trunk which chiefly distinguishes trees from other growing plants.

CHAPTER II

FRUITS AND SEEDS

LESSON 1

Season. About first week in October.

Materials required for each pupil.

One broad bean which has been soaking 12—24 hours in water and one unsoaked one. One acorn in its cup. One of each of the following fruits or seeds:—hazel nut, rose-hip, grain of wheat, Spanish chestnut, horse-chestnut.

Nearly every kind of tree passes the first stage of its existence wrapped in a seed in a tiny, sometimes microscopic, form. A very long time ago, before flowers as we now know them existed at all, some of the only plants that made any attempt at flowering belonged to the pine family. Their seeds were placed directly on scaly leaves and were uncovered, as is the case with pine seeds to-day.—If you slip a knife between the scales of a ripe pine cone in the early summer you will find