

EDITORIAL

SOME PROBABLE RESULTS FROM CONSERVATION.

Among subjects of general interest to the people of the United States, perhaps none is more frequently mentioned at the present moment than conservation of national resources. In the editorial by Professor J. F. Kemp which appeared in an earlier issue of this Journal much was said concerning the conservation policy—but the results of the present conservation policy have not been adequately stated. Although no two individuals agree as to the precise meaning and scope of conservation, yet because of the attitude of the public press and the general demand for something which bears this name we may take it for granted that the phrase appeals very strongly to the great mass of the people and especially to those who have no immediate connection with the mining industry. Sooner or later this interest is likely to find expression in the modification of the laws which for many years have governed the development and disposition of the public domain. Many bills have been already introduced into our state and national legislatures dealing with one or another of the various phases of the question. Few changes have been made as yet, but these are important, and it can hardly be doubted that the net result within a few years will be a radical reversal of the liberal provisions under which heretofore the natural resources of the country have been placed within the reach of the man whose enterprise, foresight and money were at command for their development. Already by congressional enactment and executive order those tracts of oil lands, water powers and forests still belonging to the public domain, have been either

¹ The signed editorials which it is designed to publish from time to time in these columns are expressions of individual views and do not represent the consensus of opinion of the editorial board.

entirely withdrawn from entry or placed upon a rental or royalty basis whose terms are at present a handicap to their operation and production. No longer does a homesteader receive in his patent a title to the surface of the ground as well as to all that lies beneath. No longer can the prospector hope to benefit by whatever he discovers. Even in far-away Alaska he can expect but meager reward. The valuable and attractive lands are either "temporarily" withdrawn from entry or are subject only to lease.

The general attitude in the older portions of the country and in the regions remote from the newer, sparsely settled and undeveloped territory, appears to be that conservation of this kind is an unalloyed blessing. Rarely if ever has a suggestion been made that it may eventually result to the disadvantage of the people at large. On the contrary, the wide-spread feeling is rather that of heirs who have at last attained their rights in an inheritance, long withheld by wicked and designing guardians. Few have considered that the profits accruing from the development of mineral resources are more often conditioned by wise, prudent and economical management than by the inherent value of the deposits themselves. To still fewer has it occurred that stagnation and paralysis may lie before, or that a horde of governmental officials is a poor exchange for the incentives and rewards which have hitherto crowned wisely directed individual effort. We may for a moment turn our attention to this phase.

The first result of a change in our national policies toward the development of resources will be—and indeed already in instances has been—a slackening of interest and a falling off in new enterprises. Greater and greater burdens are to be imposed upon capital. Costs will be increased and profits lessened, at least for a time. The man whose coal in the ground costs only a fraction of a cent per ton will have a marked advantage over the newcomer who must pay a high purchase price or royalty to the government. The same holds true with oil wells and water-powers. Indeed, a somewhat intimate familiarity with business conditions throughout the country from New York to Seattle and from Alaska to Arizona has forced upon me the

conviction that, as a result of the conservation movement, there is already a marked (and there will be a greater) decline in the number of new enterprises. The situation is deeply discouraging to the pioneer residents of large sections of the West; and we are already hearing loud protests against the eastern theory of conservation.

It is an economic truism that nations, like individuals, cannot long stand still. They must either progress or retrograde. When their own resources have been completely developed they must seek fields of endeavor elsewhere or soon begin to fall behind in the race for supremacy. Ultimately they will decay. In no field of human endeavor is there greater reward in individual and national growth than in successfully attacking and solving the problems of nature in new countries and under new conditions. Recognition of this fact has led to the establishment of technical schools and colleges which are liberally endowed and supported by private and public benefactions. From these institutions are coming each year a small army of graduate engineers, civil, electrical, mechanical and mining, ready and eager for employment in new fields of enterprise and development.

These men will be the first to realize the meaning and effect of conservation. Old and completed enterprises do not require new blood and energy. They are already in full operation under those whose labor and genius were devoted to their creation. It is in the new enterprises that the younger engineer who has gained the necessary experience, finds his opportunity to show his capacity, and to win a place in the profession. Any change in policy which restricts or destroys these opportunities will bear most heavily upon him. The demand for labor of all sorts will also be reduced, and Coxey's armies of the unemployed will again be possible. The resultant effect upon general business requires no description and need not concern us here. But the effect upon the attendance at our engineering schools and universities is something that may well engage the attention of our educators and even of our legislators and political economists.

Now, lest I be called an alarmist and an agitator, let me outline,

what in my opinion, are likely to be some of the further results of conservation in the United States.

Although timid and selfish, capital will not remain indefinitely cooped up and idle. It may even become courageous and look for other worlds to conquer. And in these days of rapid transit and cheap transportation, other worlds are not so remote as formerly, indeed, they have been. Mexico and Canada are already in close commercial relations with us and have been receiving for years past those contributions in the way of investments which have greatly aided their growth. South America and Siberia are not far away. Both are full of opportunities and will more and more attract the surplus which in our country will be seeking employment. Africa too is a land of great promise. Of the three, however, South America is the one to which our investors will most naturally turn and in that direction will flow American dollars and energy, American brawn and brain in the next two decades. There, ready to be had for the asking, are still lands, mines, forests and water-powers. There are farms and ranches and town-sites to be developed and populated and the people of those southern countries are waiting for our assistance. Argentine Republic has shown the possibilities, but as is well known, it has been chiefly assisted in its development by Europeans. Now, however, that the United States have gone so far and are apparently bent on going so much farther in establishing European conditions here—conditions in which a bureaucracy is so strong and a citizenry so weak—one must expect the money and the enterprising spirits to be increasingly attracted to the southern hemisphere.

The young student of engineering and the young geologist who are alive to the rapidly developing changes in American conditions will do well to inform himself about lands and peoples in which or among which the door of opportunity is still open or at least as with us has not begun to close.