

The practical utility of land, water, and forest has been diminished seriously by our determination to allow them to serve no purposes but our own. This exploitation led Maurice Maeterlinck, the Belgian dramatist and writer, to say: "Everything seems to foretell that man, the last comer to this earth, will be the first to leave it".

Through the use of his intellect, man has to some extent escaped from the controls of nature. He has meddled with small parts of a machine of whose total design and purpose he was ignorant. He now faces the hard task of encouraging natural forces to work in restoration of the damage he has done. Because of the danger attending ignorance, we need much more information about nature than we have yet gathered. Even well meant efforts may bring disaster, as witness the experience with deer at Kaibab Forest, on the north rim of Grand Canyon. When, in an effort to increase the population of deer, the authorities killed off great numbers of mountain lions, coyotes, wolves, and other predators, the deer population increased from 4,000 to 100,000 in fourteen years. The land did not have the carrying capacity for that huge number, and consumption of all the food was followed, in two years, by a sixty per cent reduction in the herd through starvation.

Hunting and fishing, formerly practised for the food they yielded, are valued today chiefly for their recreational use. Once in a while we encounter something that is very far from sport, and we see the wilderness in its sourest mood. It is the rampage of a killer who wastes wildlife for what he calls a bag. He gets no satisfaction except that of saying, "Something which wanted to live is dead". The true sportsman knows the spirit of the outdoor world. He follows the rules of the game. He believes in and obeys laws which protect wildlife.

One of the most repulsive of the destructive results of human expansion is the poisoning of rivers, with consequent extinction of fish and of well nigh every living thing except mould and putrefactive bacteria. The fisheries of the lakes, ponds, and streams are among our most important recreational resources. But our rivers are choked with the refuse of civilisation. Our lakes are poisoned by industrial and sewage pollution. The water is dangerous to drink and risky to swim in; the plants are killed which should help to purify

the water. Here and there across the continent municipalities are trying to stop the process of pollution. Several shipping companies have been prosecuted for dumping oil in our inland waterways, and a 50-mile zone off Newfoundland's east coast has been declared a region in which oil may not be dumped.

And now we are exercised about nuclear fallout. Its effect upon living things is a matter of debate, but there seems to be reason to believe that fallout will be like another influence superimposed upon all natural things.

It is because of growing awareness of the vital need for knowledge and action that the first national Canadian conference on conservation is to be held next year. Its title is "Resources for Tomorrow".

#### *How is One to Learn?*

It is a great loss to travel the countryside and not see it, since contact with nature is a vital part of man's enjoyment of life. Facts about nature may be read in books (like *The Ladder of Life* by A. Gowans Whyte, and *The Great Chain of Life* by Joseph Wood Krutch, both introductory books) and seen on television (as in Dr. Ian McTaggart Cowan's *Web of Life*, the Sunday CBC programme from Vancouver). But after sampling in this way we shall want to go into the woods and sit down.

The centuries of dead leaves that have fluttered to the ground have provided a rich layer of mould, soft as any carpet, with an embroidery of wild flowers to make it beautiful. The drama being played among the trees is without end. In the treetops the robins are singing their absurd but delicious little four-noted songs; saucy squirrels are gambolling in the branches; ants are scurrying among last year's leaves on their mysterious errands. These children of nature are all straightforward creatures with very simple intentions, and every one is supplied with beauties of one kind or another. Watching them, we realise that the mystery of life is not a problem to be solved, but a reality to be experienced and preserved.

Biologists are aware of the need to preserve nature's balance, and of the techniques, but only public opinion nurtured amid such scenes can make the application of these procedures effective. There is no automatic force in nature which will carry human beings forward