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# CONSERVATION AS A FOUNDATION OF PERMANENT PEACE\*

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**T**HIRTY-TWO years ago there was held in Washington a Conference which was the first of its kind. It was the first not only in America, but also in the world. It was also the first conference in the history of this country of the Governors of all the States and territories with the President of the United

States. Since it included also the Congress, the Cabinet, the Supreme Court, scientific experts, representatives of national associations, and outstanding citizens, it was one of the most distinguished gatherings ever brought together in the United States.

But no one of these was the essential reason for its epoch-making importance. The reason why the meeting of the governors with President Theodore Roosevelt in the White House in May, 1908, may well be regarded by future historians as a turning point in human history, the reason why it exerted and continues to exert a vital influence on the United States, on the other nations of the

Americas, and on the nations of the whole world, is this: it was called to introduce, and it did introduce, to mankind the newly formulated policy of the conservation of natural resources.

Even at that time the profound significance of conservation was beginning to make itself felt. In announcing his intention of calling the Conference, the President said: "The conservation of natural resources is the fundamental problem. Unless we solve that problem it will avail us little to solve all others....It [the Conference] ought to be among the most important gatherings in our history, for none has had a more vital question to consider."

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**BY THE HON. GIFFORD PINCHOT,  
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This Conference set forth in impressive fashion, and it was the first national meeting in any country to set forth, the idea that the protection, preservation, and wise use of the natural resources of the earth is not a series of separate and independent tasks but one single problem. As the President said: "The various uses of our natural resources are so closely connected that they should be coordinated and should be treated as parts of a coherent plan."

The Conference asserted that the conservation of natural resources is the one most fundamentally important problem of all. It drove home the basic truth that the planned and orderly development of the earth and all it contains is absolutely indispensable to the permanent prosperity of the human race. It spread far and wide the new proposition that the purpose of conservation of natural resources is the greatest good of the greatest number for the longest time. It taught the people of the United States, and other peoples, the new meaning of the word conservation, which in its present application to natural resources was then generally unknown.

By defining, describing, and making known the new word and the new policy, by endowing it with the approval and support of the leaders of all the States, of the great industries, and of the nation itself, the Governor's Conference put conservation in a firm place in the knowledge and thoughts of the people. From that moment conservation became an inseparable part of the national policy of the United States.

It is worth mention that this brilliant example of national foresight occurred not in a time of scarcity, not in a depression, but in a time of general abundance and well-being. The unanimous declaration of the Governors ended with this discerning admonition: "Let us conserve the foundations of our prosperity."

It may be difficult to-day, when conservation is accepted almost as widely as the Ten Commandments, to realize that only a generation ago there was no such thing as a conservation policy. The very word conservation, as we use it to-day, had no existence.

The conception which we know as conservation originated and was formulated in the United States Forest Service in the early winter of 1907. Conservation grew out of forestry. Thus, conservation was born without a name. But it had to be given a name before it could be introduced to the people.

After discussion among perhaps half a dozen men, the name conservation was tentatively decided on. Thereupon it was submitted to and approved by Theodore Roosevelt, and the infant was christened accordingly. We know the growing youngster, thirty-three years old but growing still, by that same name today. The hold conservation has gained in these thirty-three years upon the civilized peoples of the world is little less than amazing. Today the soundness of the conservation policy is everywhere accepted as a matter of course.

The Conference of Governors recommended and was followed by the appointment of conservation commissions by a majority of the States, and of the National Conservation Commission, which later in January of 1909 submitted to the President the first national inventory of natural resources ever made. In February of that same year the North American Conservation Conference, the first international conference to consider the policy of conservation, met in Washington at the invitation of President Theodore Roosevelt.

In his address at the opening of the Conference in the White House the President made this highly significant statement:

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"...In international relations the great feature of the growth of the last century has been the gradual recognition of the fact that instead of its being normally to the interest of each nation to see another depressed, it is normally to the interest of each nation to see the others elevated...I believe that the movement that you this day initiate is one of the utmost importance to this hemisphere and may become of the utmost importance to the world at large."

The North American Conservation Conference declared that the movement for the conservation of natural resources on the continent of North America "is of such a nature and of such general importance that it should become world-wide in its scope." Therefore it suggested to the President "that all nations should be invited to join together in conference on the subject of world resources and their inventory, conservation, and wise utilization."

What the Conference thus recommended was, however, already under way. The President had foreseen the North American Conference would be a precursor of a world conference. Accordingly, to quote Elihu Root, then Secretary of State: "By an aide-memoire in January last [1909], the principal governments were informally sounded to ascertain whether they

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would look with favour upon an invitation to send delegates to such a conference. The responses so far have been uniformly favourable, and the conference of Washington has suggested to the President that a similar general conference be called by him. The President feels, therefore, that it is timely to initiate the suggested world conference for the conservation of natural resources, by a formal invitation."

With the concurrence of the Netherlands, invitations were sent to fifty-eight nations to meet at the Peace Palace in The Hague in September, 1909. Thirty of the nations, including Great Britain, France, Germany, Canada, and Mexico had already accepted when President Taft, who succeeded Theodore Roosevelt on March 4, 1909, killed the plan.

Two attempts have been made to revive it. At the end of the War of 1914-1918, President Wilson, at the suggestion of Colonel House, took steps toward securing world-wide co-operation in the conservation and distribution of natural resources. Unfortunately nothing came of it.

During President Hoover's administration a group of nearly two hundred citizens from all parts of the United States urged

him in a public petition to take action along the same general line. Again nothing came of it.

But these checks notwithstanding, the conservation problem remains the fundamental human problem. Without natural resources, no human life is possible. Without abundant natural resources civilized life can neither be developed nor maintained. To the human race, land is the basic natural resource. The demand for new territory made by one nation against another, is a demand for additional natural resources; and it is not necessary to point out how many times this demand has plunged nations into war.

In view of the foregoing, I have a definite plan to suggest—a plan for permanent peace through international co-operation in the conservation and distribution of natural resources.

Natural life everywhere is built on the foundation of natural resources. Throughout human history the exhaustion of these resources and the need for new supplies have been among the greatest causes of war.

A just and permanent world peace is vital to the best interests of all nations. When the terms which will end the present war

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are considered, the neutral nations should be in a position to assist in finding the way to such a peace. That being so, it would be wise to prepare in time.

The proposal is that the nations of the Americas prepare now for an endeavor to bring all nations together, at the right moment, in a common effort for conserving the natural resources of the earth, and for assuring to each nation access to the raw materials it needs, without recourse to war.

In all countries some natural resources are being depleted or destroyed. Needless waste or destruction of necessary resources anywhere threatens or will threaten, sooner, or later, the welfare and security of peoples everywhere. Conservation is clearly a world necessity not only for enduring prosperity but also for permanent peace.

No nation is self-sufficient in essential raw materials. The welfare of every nation depends on access to natural resources from other nations which it lacks. Fair access to natural resources from other nations is therefore an indispensable condition of permanent peace.

War is still an instrument of national policy for the safeguarding of natural resources or for securing them from other

nations. Hence international co-operation in conserving, utilizing, and distributing natural resources to the mutual advantage of all nations might well remove one of the most dangerous of all obstacles to a just and permanent world peace.

The conservation of natural resources and fair access to needed raw materials are steps toward the common good to which all nations must in principle agree. Since the American nations are less dependent on imported natural resources than European nations, and since they are already engaged in broadening international trade through negotiated agreements, their initiative to such ends would be natural and appropriate.

The problem of permanent peace includes, of course, great factors which the foregoing proposal does not cover. But it does cover that factor which is certainly, in the long run, the most potent of them all.

If the foregoing proposal is adopted, facts in support of it will be needed, and a plan for assembling them. The formulation of a general policy and a specific programme of action would follow.

Facts for each nation separately, for groups of nations, and for the whole world might well be assembled under the general classes of forests, waters, lands, minerals, and wild-life. In very brief outline, they should include: resources in existence; consumption; probable duration; waste; conservation, if any; necessary reserves; available surplus; present interdependence of nations in natural resources (raw materials), with the origin, destination, and quantities of imports and exports; present barriers to "fair access"; and sources of pressure upon nations to acquire natural resources.

The information just outlined undoubtedly exists in sufficient detail for the present purpose, and can be put together without original investigation. It could well be done through a Commission appointed for that purpose representing all the American nations.

The gathering of information through the creation of such a Commission might, I believe, properly be recommended by the Eighth American Scientific Congress to the governments of the American nations.

Formulation by the Commission of a plan and of recommendations to the American Governments for a general policy and a specific programme of action, including the presentation of the plan when prepared to neutral and belligerent nations, would follow.

Such a Commission would be of immense and lasting value to the American nations. It could not but advance their interests, both individual and mutual, in addition to opening a road toward a workable basis for permanent peace.

Finally, the situation in Europe and in Asia suggests that action for the purpose outlined above was never more necessary than at present. □

### NOTE

\* Substance of a paper read on May 11 [1940] before the Eighth American Scientific Congress at Washington