REPORT.

INTRODUCTION.

The undersigned, having been appointed Commissioners, under the provisions of a law of the State of Wisconsin, entitled "an act relating to the growth of forest trees," approved March 23, 1867, to ascertain and report in detail to the legislature at its next session certain facts and opinions relating to the injurious effects of clearing the land of forests upon the climate; the evil consequences to the present and future inhabitants; the duty of the state in regard to the matter; what experiments should be made to perfect our knowledge of the growth and proper management of forest trees; the best method of preventing the evil effects of their destruction; what substitutes for wood can be found in the state; and generally such facts as may be deemed most useful to persons desirous of preserving or increasing the growth of forest and other trees in this state—have complied with the duties thus imposed upon them, as well as the limited time and want of adequate means would allow, and now have the honor to submit the following report:

NECESSITY OF TREES.

Both past history and present experience show that a country destitute of forests as well as one entirely covered with them is only suited to the condition of a barbarous or semi-barbarous people. Deprive a people of the comforts and conveniences derived directly or indirectly from forest products, and they soon revert to barbarism. It is only where a due proportion between the cultivated land and the forests is maintained that man can attain and enjoy his highest civilization.

It would seem to be the part of wisdom in a state, as well as with individuals, to profit by the experience of others, in the present and in past time, to imitate their good works and to avoid their evil doings.

For it seems to be established as a fact that a country entirely covered with dense timber, as well as one destitute of trees, are each inhabited by savages. As heavy forests are removed and the country is brought under culture, civilization advances until a certain breadth of plowing and pasture is reached; but if the removal of trees advances beyond that extent, so that the country is denuded of its trees, barbarism equally ferocious as in the timbered region again sets in. In the one case the savage men, desti-
tate of all domestic animals except the dog, are driven to the seacoast and water-courses, where by means of rudely constructed canoes they gratify the human passion for migration to and from their small corn patch, fishing places and hunting grounds; in the other, the horse, the camel or even the ox affords the means of wandering over extensive countries of thin grass, or desert sands, in quest of their prey.

Palestine, a land once "flowing with milk and honey," so full of native products as to attract the children of Israel from the highly favored plains of Egypt; a country which for many ages sustained a numerous, happy and prosperous people, is now comparatively a barren waste; its productions scarcely sufficient for a miserable population dwindled to only one-tenth of its former numbers. The most careful examination of the soil shows no want of the elements of vegetable growth—it remains as fertile to-day as in the most ancient times, thus showing that we must look to the changes in the local condition of the climate, rather than the exhaustion of the soil for the causes of the wonderful changes that have taken place; and these local climatic changes could only be produced by the indiscriminate destruction of the forests that originally covered the whole country.

Egypt and Palestine were once the granary of the world, but these countries have long since lost their proud position among the nations of the earth. We now claim to hold the keys to the food-production of the country, but we are also in danger of soon losing the position unless we profit by their example.

WARNINGS OF HISTORY.

Warnings from the experience of others may be found nearer home, and in more modern times. According to a recent report, it appears that in Switzerland the forests have been destroyed at such a rate that they do not now yield an adequate supply for the present inhabitants. The higher mountain regions have heretofore been considered the store houses of wood for the most populous parts of level Switzerland, and for foreign countries; but the depredations have been so extensive that many of the inhabitants are now suffering for the want of wood, and some of them are compelled to convey their fuel from six to twelve miles up the mountains. If the future forests, (says this report,) should not be better managed, and their too extensive removal stopped, they would soon be entirely ruined in some parts of these mountain regions, and then there would prevail such a state of things as already exists in Asia-Minor, Greece, a large portion of Italy, Spain, Southern France, &c., where forests abounded in former times. The decrease of fertility on the Alps, and especially on the upper boundary, the disappearance of the forests in the higher regions, the unfavorable changes of the weather during the time of vegetation, the frequent and extensive devastations of floods, avalanches, and precipitation of rocks, and large landslides on the sides of the mountains, filling up the valleys, are chiefly occa-