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John Erskine: Under the Forest' With illustrations by M. Jane McNeill I once accompanied a visiting teacher from Virginia who was eager to collect some sea weeds while she was in Halifax, Her com? ment on our flora astonished me: "I can't get over seeing Christmas-trees growing everywhere." I had quite forgotten that sensation, though I had spent most of my life in milder climates where, except on poor soils or after burning, all trees were broad-leaved. Yet the spruce forest belongs to the far north and, even in Nova Scotia, is not wholly natural. Pines belong to the sandy soils of the Valley; fir has the last word on the high plateau of Cape Breton, spruce on the exposed coast; and hemlock some? times foirms solid stands on well-drained slopes. Otherwise our evergreen woods re? sult from the cutting or burning of hard? wood lands. Forest Cycle There is very little that can be called virgin forest in Nova Scotia. Even in the more inaccessible valleys of northern Cape Breton the woods are not what they were a century ago, and the blame cannot be laid wholly at the door of the lumbermen. In the boyhood of our older men a sawfly shifted its dependence from spruce to the larch or hackmatack of wet lands. These had formerly made thick groves which in May put out soft green needles and small crimson tufts of flower, passed the summer thinly clad in green, changed to yellow in October, and then were left bare and grey through the long dead season. But this sea? son was not so dead that lichens could not profit by it, so the branches of the hack? matack became hung with old-man's-beard, and in winter the caribou drifted through the groves, finding there their winter food. Now the sawfly laid its eggs on the buds of the larch and rapidly killed them over great areas. So the lichens lost their home, the caribou lost their winter food and disappeared, the wolves and the Indians who depended upon the caribou, moved away. Nichols, studying the hardwood forests of Cape Breton about the time of the first world war, estimated the cover as ninety per cent beech. A few years later a para? sitic fungus ran through the forest, and today only a few tall trees and a remnant Ch.rl5tnia?? Fern Pot'iattchum- acro8tlchotde?? Docf-tooth. Vtot?t Erythronium. atnertccinunx -WOODLAND PLANTS OF EARLY SPRING- of cankered second-growth remain of the beech woods. That left birch as the domin? ant tree, until ten years ago birch "die- back" swept the province. In some of the un lumbered valleys of the north the dead and fallen birches still lie in tangled masses through which even deer cannot pene? trate. Today around Cape North fir-covered hillsides are bronzed as though scorched by the activities of bud-worm, and the moths rise in clouds from web-tangled spruces. or on Trans-Canada Hwy. |PliM 5 miles west of Baddeck • Swimming Pool - Hot Showers • Laundromat - Camper's Store • Supervised Children's Program • Full Hook-ups - Canoeing 295-2288 BADDECK - CABOT TRAIL ??CAMPGROUND Miners'Village Restaurant We are fully licensied and we feature a complete menu from! sandwiches to full-course meals j In the setting of a turn-of-the-century mining community adjacent to the Miners' Museum Complex 11 AM to 9 PM, Phone:.849-1788 QUARRY POINT, GLACE BAY (49)