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TIME THAT RAILROADS EXTENDED AID

The forest service has at last succeeded in interesting the railroads of the west in the movement to prevent forest fires. The railroads have been indifferent in the past, although it was greatly to their interest to prevent destruction of timber. It remains to be seen just how far the companies will go in clearing the record of past years.

C. R. Burnes of the extension division of the Minnesota agricultural college, suggests that the states enact a law placing all forests, private as well as public, under the control of a state forestry commission. Maine has already done this and the highest court in the land has sustained the constitutionality of the law. He suggests that if the owners of the cut-over lands, still littered with slashings, won't clean them up, the state should do so and reimburse itself by a sufficient tax, a failure to pay which tax should forfeit the land to the state without further proceedings or delays.

Speaking of the Minnesota situation, which prevails in many other sections, Mr. Burnes says:

"And all this loss could have been prevented. It all comes as a penalty for the short-sighted greed of our lumbermen—a greed which has prevented them from obeying the plainest dictates of prudence and common sense in their operations. They have been urged for years to burn their slashings as soon as cut; to open fire-breaks through their timbered lands; to employ a sufficient patrol in seasons of drouth, so as to check any fire in its incipiency. But they would adopt none of these precautions. And even when the law was enacted, at the last session of the legislature, requiring the burning of slashings in future lumbering operations, they very generally evaded it and set it at naught. It is now proved, as General Andrews stated, that the law did not go far enough. It should have compelled the piling and burning, not only of new slashings, but of those accumulated on lands lumbered in past years.

"The railroads, too,—whose locomotives have very probably furnished the sparks which incited some, if not all of the fires now raging—have shown the same unwillingness to take needed precautions in times of drouth against the starting and spreading of forest fires. They have fought in the courts the law compelling them to maintain at such times a sufficient patrol. If all the losses now borne by the communities along their lines could be made chargeable to the railroads and the lumbermen, the penalty would be richly deserved."