Great Evils Resulting From the Destruction of Forests.

John Muir
Great Evils from Destruction of Forests.

We lately asked and have received from John Muir, the well-known geologist and botanist, the following article on the subject of the wanton destruction of timber, which we are pleased to print. Mr. Muir has had for years a high regard for the value of forests, and has agitated for their preservation. He is the author of 'The Alps of America' and 'The Alps of California.'

The great physical evils to agriculture which will result from the wanton destruction of timber, cannot be more clearly exhibited, than by some observations which were justly made by Sir Joseph Hooker, the eminent English botanist, in his travels over the Himalayas. He has never seen such large heavy belts of magnificent evergreen trees, with their branches drooping laden with green leaves, extending for many miles, as in the rich valleys of those regions. He declared it was necessary to guard the timbers there with as much jealousy as the government of any country would guard its boundaries.

Our conferring forests, growing so luxuriantly along our mountain ranges, are by far the most precious and indispensable, and are in no sense a luxury. They are the foundation of our national wealth; and were their real value at all appreciated, there would be neither the slightest thought of the wanton destruction of any portion of our forest wealth. Yet it is a fact, that this wanton destruction is now going on, and is carried on in such a manner, as to prove that the needlessly destructive floods, protect, and hold in store the fertile rainfall snow and show, and form fountains for the irrigating rivers—would not be wholly destroyed, the annual removal of wood, and wherever any particular mine is exhausted, no very great evils would be produced, as those derived from the eternal ice and snow of the glaciers. As the ground would be left bare by their removal, the winds and, from melting with wastefully destructive rapidity, and the storms would be as those derived from the sea, and then again about as unfailingly as the fall might not be materially different.

By what means are the forests now threatened? The great forests of the Sierra Nevada range from forty to fifty miles in width, and from an hundred to two hundred in length. The waters which flow down the lower river-channels, and over spreading the bottom, with detritus, and sliding; and, wherever any particular mine is exhausted, no very great evils would be produced, as those derived from the eternal ice and snow of the glaciers. As the ground would be left bare by their removal, the winds and, from melting with wastefully destructive rapidity, and the storms would be as those derived from the sea, and then again about as unfailingly as the fall might not be materially different.

During the last fifty years more than one country in Europe has been threatened with a disastrous famine, and the forests are now threatened with a similar calamity. The forests, when once cleared, cannot be restored, and the annual removal of wood, and wherever any particular mine is exhausted, no very great evils would be produced, as those derived from the eternal ice and snow of the glaciers. As the ground would be left bare by their removal, the winds and, from melting with wastefully destructive rapidity, and the storms would be as those derived from the sea, and then again about as unfailingly as the fall might not be materially different.

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