

PORTLAND, OREGON, ~~Sept. 28,~~ 1905

Mr. Frank B. Cole,
Tacoma, Wash.

My dear Sir:

Yours of the 23d inst. received, and I thank you for the same. I note your exceptions to my statement that the Indians preserved the forests by burning off the grass and trash every fall, thus keeping the ground clean and causing but a light fire.

I would say in furtherance of my view, that in the days of my earlier boyhood and before that time, that such was the habit of the Indians, and in no case did they ~~cause any~~ damage, they kept the ground clean and open. I have travelled through the big burn between Coos Bay and the Coquille, also the one between Yaquina Bay and Netarts and the old one five miles East of Portland between the Columbia and Clackamas Rivers. They burned about 100 years ago, perhaps longer ago than that, and in no instance has the old ground of fir been replaced by fir timber, in every case the new growth is of maple, dogwood, "Chittum," Willow, Alder, and other small stuff.

I lived in the Coos Bay country in 1873, and heard the legend of the heavy rains having washed the ashes into the bay and thus killing the oysters, and also know of the oyster shells being dredged up, proving that they once existed there. But, I have always suspected "Starfish" more than the "ashes" story. Netarts Bay 35 years ago produced the best oysters on this Coast, and the largest, except "Samonish" bay, but the starfish got them long ago, or at least has left but a few "runts."

I still believe that the Indian did much to preserve the

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timber by the means I mentioned, and also that the large firs mentioned were perhaps caused by other means. At present I am a member of the Portland Water Board, which derives its supply of water from Bull Run Lake in the Cascade water shed, about 50 miles square of which has been reserved by the Government for the protection of the timber. This tract has been under the observation of good rangers for several years, and some of their worst fires have been caused by lightning during thunder storms. Others - and this yarn will startle you no doubt as it did me when I heard it - they say have been caused by rocks falling off the mountain side and striking against other rocks, the sparks would cause the dry trash after the manner of the old "flint and steel" method of making a fire with "tinder" used before matches were invented. If such causes produce fires now, and it seems to be a fact they do, why not then? At any rate the risk was infinitely less in a forest fire from leaves and trash than it is now with a collection of say 50 years littered over the ground.

As a matter of interest along this line I wish to add that the character of timber growth between the foothills of the Cascade range and the Coast range has changed sometime during the past 300 or 400 years, and such change is still going on. At one time it was all Oak. Further South the Oak has been choked out, and is still being forced out by the fir. This is to be seen here about Portland and can be traced South down the Willamette Valley as I have often observed. I do not think a forest of one kind of growth replaces itself in ages, it exhausts the soil so far as it is concerned for a long time, the

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same as any other crop does. As for fire it also destroys the seed, and it takes it a long time to become reseeded.

In every forest here where no fire has ever been known the large trees have their bark charred, showing the effects of the Indians fires. Of course every old pitch root at the foot of a dead snag burned.

Very truly yours,