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Some Forest Fables

No. 1

By Dr. C. D. Howe

Once upon a time a farmer owned a very large field. It extended over many, many acres. The field was covered with a valuable crop. The soil was of such nature that it would produce only this one particular crop. It was too poor to raise hay, oats, potatoes, wheat or any of the ordinarily cultivated crops. Each season the farmer harvested a portion of his crop and sold it in town.

One dry day in summer he discovered a fire in his field. Instead of calling his neighbors to help him fight the fire, the farmer said to himself: "The field is very large. I will let the fire burn. There will be a-plenty left." So the fire burned until it was quenched by rain. The next season, however, the farmer had to go farther from town to harvest his crop. Being farther away it cost him more to get his crop to the market, so he increased the price of his product, or in other words, the consumer paid for the farmer's neglect in protecting his crop.

The following summer another fire destroyed more of the farmer's field. He soliloquised as before: "The field is very large. It extends over many, many acres. There will be a-plenty left. Let the fire burn," and the fire did burn until the coming of rain. He went still farther from town for his next harvest. It cost him still more to get his product to market, and he raised his price to the consumer.

These things were repeated year after year. The farmer said so often: "I have such a large field. There is a-plenty more," that he actually believed it, and he made his neighbors believe it, but each year he went farther from town to cut his crop and each year the consumer paid the additional cost on transportation. Each year the fires burning and re-burning reduced the future crop producing capacity of his field.

This is a real fable. No farmer would stand idly by and see his crop periodically