

PART I.

NEW ZEALAND.

I.—PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES AND RESOLUTIONS.

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Parliamentary
Debate, 1868.

THE FORESTS OF THE COLONY.

("Hansard," 7th October, 1868.)

MR. POTTS moved, "That it is desirable Government should take steps to ascertain the present condition of the forests of the Colony, with a view to their better conservation." He had put that motion on the Order Paper in order that some attention might be drawn to the state of the forests of New Zealand at the present time. Although it might more vitally affect the Middle Island, at the same time he thought the forests of the entire Colony should have some attention bestowed upon them. He had waited with patience to see if some steps would be taken to preserve the forests, which were the admiration of every visitor to New Zealand; and he considered that it was quite time that some action should be taken in the matter. By taking that course he did not intend to wound any provincial susceptibilities by imputing any blame to those gentlemen who had the administration of Crown Lands, although his impression was that it would have been well if more attention had been given to the state of the forests and waste lands. He considered the rapidity with which the woods were destroyed would make them disappear in a short time, and work a great change in the prospects of the settlers. The mischievous results from the cutting down of forests in a wholesale manner had called for the attention of the Legislature of Victoria; and in America, where the settlers had been exceedingly wasteful of the wood, it had been suggested to the Government that they should make some reserves in perpetuity. Marsh, an American writer on physical geography as modified by human action, citing the effects of disforestation on the French slopes of the Alps, and other localities, carefully points out the varied influence of the forests, as shelter, on temperature, on humidity, on floods, on the flow of springs; and his arrangement of facts proves the removal of forests to be the primary cause of excessive inundations. He (Mr. Potts) believed they could see an example of this in the stream which flows through the valley of the Hutt. Since the settlers of that part of the Province commenced clearing, an entire change had taken place in the river. He believed a very short time would effect a similar change in the rivers of Westland. Hochstetter, speaking of the local character of that noblest of New Zealand trees, the kauri pine, says:—"Extensive districts, which had formerly been covered with kauri wood, are now totally destitute of such, and the extermination of that noble tree progresses from year to year at such a rate, that its final extinction is as certain as that of the natives of New Zealand." Writing of the soil requisite for the growth of kauri, he says:—"Individuals should not be suffered to ravage those precious woods, and to turn the country into a desert, to the detriment of whole generations to come. For the sake of a few serviceable trunks, sometimes whole forests are burnt down and desolated, and what formerly had been employed in the war of cannibal tribes in a stratagem to burn out the enemy, is done now for the sake of money. The woods are ransacked and ravaged with fire and sword. During my stay in Auckland, I was able to observe from my windows, during an entire fortnight, dense clouds of smoke whirling up, which arose from an enormous destructive conflagration of the woods nearest to the town. When the fire had subsided, a large, beautiful tract of forest lay there in ashes." What will the world-wide readers of Hochstetter think of our barbarous improvidence? The same warning had been pointed out twenty-five years ago. An official of the New Zealand Company had also pointed out the destructive propensities of the settlers in cutting down valuable wood. He says:—"A melancholy scene of waste and destruction presented itself to me when I went up to see this forest. Several square miles of it were burning, having been fired in order to make room for the conveyance of logs down to the creek. Noble trees, which had required ages for their perfection, were thus ruthlessly destroyed in great numbers." The immense variety of trees, comprising most of the New Zealand trees (except the *Dammara* and *Fagus* forests, which species are mostly gregarious), should not be lost sight of, the timber being suitable for a vast variety of purposes,—spars, planks, ships' knees and timbers, ground-sills, piles, sleepers, wedges, blocks, and furniture of exquisite beauty in grain and markings. At the exhibition of 1862 he saw some splendid articles of furniture made of kauri wood sent from Auckland for exhibition, and they were very highly valued indeed. A manufacturer of furniture of high class had stated that there was great difficulty in getting the kauri wood, as well as the high price that had to be paid for it. Besides