

was for their use, the Government stepped in and offered those lands for sale, which he could only characterize as an unfair thing, or at all events it would be so considered in a private business transaction. He should have much pleasure in supporting the resolution.

Mr. STAFFORD thought the House ought to be grateful to the honorable member for Mount Herbert for calling attention to this subject, although, at the same time, he must confess he saw a difficulty in giving effect to it, as all the Government could do at present would be to enter into communication with the Provincial Governments, in whom the administration of the Crown lands virtually rested, and there the question, as was the case in almost every large one attempted to be made general, would be met by a great disparity of circumstances; for in some parts of the Colony, instead of the preservation of the original timber being an object at the present time, that timber was in fact a nuisance, preventing beneficial occupation of the country. In a work on America, written by a celebrated European traveller of great discrimination, he had been struck by an observation to the effect that those parts originally densely timbered were now but sparsely timbered, whereas in those parts where formerly there was none to be found, were now flourishing plantations, with every prospect of supply for the future; and he himself had seen exactly the same process going on in New Zealand; for settlers, where little timber existed, were impressed from the first with the idea of planting trees; whereas, when settlers found themselves in the middle of a forest, the primary idea with them and their children was to destroy the timber. There were difficulties in every way with regard to this subject: the varying land laws, the objects for which forests were to be preserved, whether for purposes of utility—in which case the course to take would be merely to guard against undue waste—or for climatic purposes, in which case, of course, destruction of timber must be prohibited for any purpose. He quite coincided with the honorable member for Mount Herbert as to the great desirability of the country being clothed with a certain amount of arboreal vegetation, merely in a climatic point of view and with reference to the fertility of the soil, for they had evidence all over Europe of the evil effects of the great destruction of the original forests, not only on the French slopes of the Alps, but in the Vosges Mountains, and through Italy, Spain, and Greece; where the soil had not only ceased to be fertile, but had been absolutely washed away. That was more particularly the case in the Apennines and in large parts of Greece. Something of the same kind had taken place in New Zealand to his knowledge already, and it would go on at an increased ratio, because cause and effect reacted on each other in the matter. If this Legislature had the sole control of the Crown lands, a general law might be imposed for reserving a certain portion for forest purposes; but an attempt to act in the matter now would be met by the multiplicity of land laws under varying conditions, so that the question, though not insuperable, yet presented enormous difficulties to any action of a general nature. There was another condition which he feared would always lead to great destruction of valuable timber, that of the timber being set on fire; and he had known of a whole district burning for three months, in spite of the efforts of every one in the district to put it out. As far as he knew, no one was aware how that fire originated, and it might have been from the spark of a match. But the same thing occurred over the country more or less every summer, and even if it were attempted to prove who set the timber on fire, it might be next to impossible to do so; or, even if it were proved, it might be a man of no means, against whom there was no remedy. That would be always a great source of destruction, the more so where the forest was enclosed against cattle, as the rank undergrowth there made a fire more irrepressible. But as far as the Government could further the object, they would be desirous to do so, by calling the attention of the different Provincial Governments to the matter, and inducing them to make such propositions as would tend to the result desired.

Mr. VOGEL said the honorable member for Taieri had taken advantage of the motion to parade before the House a provincial question, being really to this purport: Should the forests be considered in much the same light as the commonage question in certain Provinces. There was no lack of information on the subject in the Province of Otago, and the question was, which was the best means of preserving the forest lands, which had been much considered, and although he believed that, after much consideration, there was great difference of opinion, some thinking the only chance was by allowing the forests to pass into private hands, it was rather with a view of preserving the forests than any other reason that a great deal of forest land had been alienated. He believed the invariable rule in a new country was the lavish use of native forest, just as in a new and productive gold field the miner was lavish of the gold. They tried withholding from sale in Otago, and found an outcry made against it, and it became a question whether the land would not have to be given away on account of the expense caused to the Government in keeping the ground clear of thistles. The forests when alienated were strictly protected, and these bush lands were highly valued; and as far as the resolution of the honorable member for Mount Herbert was concerned, if he understood the honorable member's wish, it was that the country should be protected and the bush should be preserved. He could not see how there was the slightest probability of bringing in a question on which a member had been defeated in his Province, and giving him the opportunity of parading it before the House on any question. The question of forest land was something the same as that of commonage, and they were all interested in the best means of protecting the Native forests, and teaching the people not to be too lavish in their use, and making them understand that a district might become desolate on account of the destruction of Native timber; and he might mention here that it was in contemplation in his Province to devise some means for encouraging an extensive system of planting. He had made those remarks because he would be sorry to have it supposed that in the Province of Otago