

PART I.
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Parliamentary
Debate, 1868.

those who had the charge of the Government were not alive to the advantages of preserving the forest. They found that there were a large number of licenses issued every year, and there was therefore great danger of fire, and that in fact the selling of the bush in small parcels, and not in large tracts, to private individuals, had been by far the most successful means of preserving it. It was with that view that the sales had been made in the Province to which he had the honor to belong.

Mr. TRAVERS said he did not understand that his honorable friend proposed to interfere with the disposal of forest land to private individuals, but that his motion was directed to the conservance of the forests which still remained public property. He had been professionally concerned in the action to which his honorable friend alluded, in which Messrs. Holmes and Co., the contractors for the Christchurch railway, recovered £3,000 for the destruction of a forest on their property. There was not the slightest doubt as to the actual value of the timber destroyed, and it was upon very clear evidence as to its value that the decision of the jury was based. The fire ran over about 5,000 or 6,000 acres of their property, and it was clear that the timber alone that was destroyed was worth over £3,000. He might say that the whole of the timber which supplied the thirty miles of railway already constructed in Canterbury was derived from that single forest. But it was not alone that forest which was destroyed; the fire in question raged over Banks' Peninsula for upwards of two months, and timber was destroyed over an area of 20,000 or 30,000 acres, and it was impossible to estimate the extent of damage actually done on that occasion. It was believed, however, that there could not have been less than some £70,000 worth of timber destroyed, for in those forests, as soon as the fire passed through, the timber fell; the most valuable, the totara, was consumed, and the remainder rapidly decayed. The destruction of the forests in the upper portion of the larger valleys had a most pernicious effect on the drainage of the country, and, by precipitating the whole of the rainfall into the rivers with great rapidity, produced the destructive floods that had become so common. In the department of the Ardeche, in France, in consequence of the timber being destroyed at the head of one of the branches of the Rhone, the precipitation of the water into the river had caused an overflow, which completely destroyed a large tract of country, and reduced to a shingle bed what had previously supported 27,000 people. The quantity of water flowing into the Rhone from that single branch was found, by computation, to exceed the water discharged by the Nile at its highest flood. He was quite satisfied that the floods of the Waimakariri and other rivers had been enormously increased by the indiscriminate burning of the timber at the head of those streams—a destruction, too, of the most wanton character. Some of it was due to the fact of the grass on the runs being burnt for the purpose of providing fresh pasture, but a large quantity was destroyed for no useful purpose. In Nelson a large portion of the forest was burnt for the purpose of clearing, without any regard to the distance which it might extend over public property. He apprehended that the intention of his honorable friend was to find out what was the condition of the forests on the public estate, so that measures might be taken to prevent their destruction by owners of private property, and to prevent the issue of licenses. It would be useless to trouble the House with any observations as to the effects that the destruction of the forests had upon the climate. It was well understood that in Canada the cold had been rendered more intense by the destruction of the forests, so that some parts of the country were almost uninhabitable. The question had been much studied in America, and it was found that the time necessary to replace the growth made it important to consider the indiscriminate destruction of the aboriginal forest, and he was sure that here also it would in a short time become a matter for serious consideration how this country was to be supplied with timber and materials for building purposes, if the present system of destruction was allowed to continue much longer. He knew that in many districts which formerly supported a large number of sawyers, it was hardly possible now to obtain timber enough for a single house. In the Province of Canterbury, nearly the whole of the timber consumed was imported from Australia and America, whilst close at hand they had valuable forests, which were being wantonly destroyed by fire. He thought it would be found, on examining the imports, that the amount sent out of the country for timber would greatly astonish those who looked into the question. The people of this Colony had really not had time to examine the values and uses of the various classes of timber, but those who had considered the matter were convinced that we possessed very valuable dyeing materials, tanning materials, and furniture woods in our forests, and it was important that, before it was too late, some steps should be taken to save them from complete destruction.

Mr. C. O'NEILL said that he would support the motion of the honorable member for Mount Herbert, as it was one that deserved the serious consideration of the House. There could not be a doubt that the fires referred to by the honorable member and the honorable member for Christchurch were doing a great deal of damage to the country. The timber was being thinned to a very serious extent, and he thought it was time that it should be looked after. There were great difficulties in the way of the conservation of the forests, such as had been spoken of by the Hon. the Colonial Secretary; but he thought there could be no difficulty in ascertaining the present condition of the forests, as requested by the honorable member. Last year the want of information relative to the forests was felt in Victoria, and a Board was appointed by His Excellency the Governor to report on the best means of securing the permanency of the State forests of that Colony. The Board was appointed on the 27th August, 1867, and, through the courtesy of the Hon. J. F. Sullivan, Minister of Mines, the report of the Board was kindly furnished to him. The report treats of the facilities to the public for obtaining timber in Victoria,