

PART I.

FOREST TREES PLANTING ENCOURAGEMENT BILL.

("Hansard," 8th November, 1871.)

Parliamentary
Debate, 1871.

The Hon. Mr. ACLAND, in moving the second reading of this Bill, explained that it was proposed first by the Provincial Council of Canterbury, and solely had reference to that Province, its object being to give a premium in the planting of forest trees in different parts of the Province, but in its progress through the other House it was thought desirable to extend its scope, and it now applied to the whole Colony, with the proviso that the Governor might from time to time bring it into force in such part of the Colony as he considered desirable. He thought it would be admitted that it was a desirable thing, in those portions of the Colony where there was no timber or where the timber was being rapidly used up, to give every encouragement that they reasonably could to induce persons to plant trees. It was not a thing that was payable at present, but if some encouragement were given, it might pay at a future time. It was proposed that if any person should plant not less than one acre with forest trees, he should be entitled to receive, for every acre so planted, a free grant of two acres of the waste lands of the Crown. There was a clause to the effect that no person at one time should be able to apply for more than 250 acres. He moved the second reading of the Bill.

The Hon. Mr. McLEAN asked the Hon. the Mover, if he planted on his private estate, he could claim two acres for every acre planted, out of waste lands open for sale in any part of the Province? If that were the case, he would vote for the Bill.

The Hon. Mr. MANTELL said the price of land in any Province of New Zealand scarcely exceeded £2 an acre, and he was sure the cost of *bond fide* planting an acre would amount to nearly £20. He saw no provision in the Bill as to the growth of the trees after they had been planted, and the Bill seemed to put it in the power of any gentleman who had acres of land he did not know what to do with, to scratch them over, sprinkle over some blue gum, or some such seed, and as soon as the things appeared above ground, and the Superintendent happened to be a friend of the person planting, he could obtain a certificate that he had planted a certain area, obtain his additional acres, and then could turn his stock upon the land. He would move that the Bill be read a second time that day six months.

The Hon. Mr. HOLMES said he was sorry that his honorable friend had taken that view of the question. People would not plant trees for the purpose of acquiring two acres of land for every one they planted; but many persons would do so quite independent of any expectation of getting land. However, the granting of a bonus in the shape of land would be an equivalent for a portion of the first outlay in putting the trees in the ground. In many districts timber was very scarce, and especially so in Canterbury and Otago, where they might travel twenty or thirty miles without seeing a tree; and nothing would benefit that country more, or improve the climate, than making extensive plantations. He himself had planted twenty or thirty acres with trees, and had succeeded very well. His honorable friend seemed to have what he would call a "down" upon blue gums; but he thought they were very valuable, because well adapted to the wants of the country. They made good firewood, capital posts and rails, and good serviceable timber. The trees grew very rapidly, as much as six feet per annum; and he had seen one twenty-three years old that was eighty-two feet high and three feet and a half through. If they could produce such a tree as that within a very short lifetime, surely it was worth while, in a country where timber was so very scarce, to hold out some additional inducement for the formation of plantations.

The Hon. Mr. MILLER thought he would vote for the amendment, for, although no one could be more in favour of planting than he was, he knew very well that keeping the trees clean was the difficulty. It was an absurd thing to say that any person who planted an acre with trees should be entitled to a grant of two acres. No condition was made as to the time at which the bonus should be given or the kind of planting required. They knew very well what would be done under the Bill. People would make all sorts of claims, and it would be open to a deal of abuse; while those who were already engaged in planting, did not require the slightest inducement to go on planting.

The Hon. Colonel WHITMORE was sorry to differ with the Hon. Mr. Mantell, and should like to have heard the views of two or three honorable members who were really authorities upon such matters. He could conceive, from his own experience in the matter, that the real question lay in the proper treatment of the tree after it had been planted. He did not think they should refuse to read the Bill a second time, because any deficiencies could be provided for in Committee. Although the Hon. Mr. Mantell might know of trees that were far better for the purpose, he would like to say a word for the blue gum, for he thought they grew quickly and gave good timber. The reward of two acres might just turn the scale when people were undecided, and induce them to plant by giving them some excuse for the expenditure of the money, and by that the whole country would more or less gain. Planting would be a profit to an individual and an advantage to the country, for if they had extensive plantations they would be saved from many of the inconveniences they suffered from. However, no reward should be given until a plantation was two or three years old, so that it might be seen that the trees had received proper attention, for it was only for about two years that they required watching and cleaning. He thought the Bill could be made a useful measure in Committee, and he hoped honorable members would not throw it out.

The Hon. Mr. ACLAND, in reply, asked attention to the fact that in Canterbury, where land was sold at a higher price than in any other Province, namely, £2 per acre, the bonus would be