

PART II.
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Victoria.

of trees to be felled, allowing trees 8 inches at the butt to be used, but only under the surveillance of the ranger. A class of men who fell trees for their bark alone should on no account be allowed in the forest. But the selector has been the greatest destroyer of the forest lands in this neighbourhood. The existence of the volcanic soil to the north of the dividing range has been the attraction. A portion still exists within the forest boundary, and is much the best timbered portion enclosed. The rest has fallen into the hands of the selector, who has rung the trees over thousands of acres, and destroyed a crop of timber that was worth to the State much more than the value of the gross produce of all the grain crops produced or likely to be produced, to judge by the prevailing crops of wild shrubs, &c. In three different places, the average of trees left standing, all above 3 feet in diameter, was twenty-five trees per acre, each tree equal to yielding on an average at least 1,800 feet superficial of sawn timber. The smaller trees had all been removed. It seems evident that a selection of forest lands should not be allowed, at least in any such centrally-situated position, until the land has been cleared of timber, or the selector should be himself bound to make use of, economically, the crop of timber upon the land before cultivation were allowed or title granted him. Prop cutters waste much timber, but their efforts to destroy sink into insignificance when placed side by side with the miles of whitened trees sacrificed to the greed of the selector on the north side of the dividing range.

Re-stocking Denuded Areas with Young Trees.—Bullarook gives strong evidence in favour of Nature's efforts being sufficient to re-stock the forests with trees if aided and results protected. In all cases where fire has cleared the ground, a sufficient number of seedlings has appeared; protection and thinning is then all that is required. Destruction by fire is the greatest risk to be provided against, and it should be the chief point of consideration to prevent such accumulations of combustible matters as would support a bush fire of any strength. If saw-millers cleared the land as they went of all useful timber, the land could then be cleared by fire of all vegetation and inflammable matter, leaving a clean seed bed, which might either be left or sown over thinly with seeds of most suitable species of eucalyptus, and then should be absolutely closed against all ingress. Cattle and goats might be allowed to graze, unless injury to young trees be observed by the rangers. At present they do no damage, and do much good in keeping down the grass, thus diminishing the fire risk. As accumulation of combustible matter must be prevented, the frequent use of fire, time and place to be carefully selected, will prove the most successful method. A moderate fire will not injure the young trees when the bark at the butt has become rough, say at the age of three or four years. At this age there will be but little inflammable matter accumulated, especially if the grass has been grazed; and fire should then be used in strips or patches, otherwise, if neglected, materials for a strong bush fire would collect, and after protection from cutting, &c., for years, the whole of the young trees would probably be swept away in a day. When the young trees are eight to ten years old, prop cutters and others might be made use of in thinning them out. This operation at an earlier period would require special employment of labour, but should also be done. As the trees increase in size, a second and more thinnings could be made, until the remaining trees matured and were fit for saw-mill purposes. After every operation each block of young forest trees should be again strictly shut up; and in every case trees should only be removed under the surveillance of the ranger, who should also take charge of the firing, or clearing, or sowing, in fact of all connected with such a system of management as may be introduced.

EXTRACTS from the REPORT of the BOARD* appointed in 1867, to INQUIRE and REPORT on the best means of SECURING the PERMANENCY of the STATE FORESTS of VICTORIA, &c.

The extensive use of Soft Woods for Building Purposes, and the importance of introducing Pine Timber Trees into the State Forests.

The absence of trees in Victoria suitable for conversion to many of the purposes connected with buildings, has necessitated the importation of large quantities of soft wood timber, in deals and sawn stuff, to meet the requirements of our building trade.

In the early periods of the gold fields, when the demand for buildings, caused by the large influx of population, was most pressing, very many houses were constructed of pine timber, owing to the dear rates of skilled labour at that time, and to the facility with which they could be erected of this material. According to the returns kindly furnished to us by the Hon. J. G. Francis, Commissioner of Customs, a copy of which is given in Appendix No. 2, attached to this report, it appears that the imports of timber into Victoria, in 1853 and 1854, reached the enormous values of £1,474,168 and £1,481,050 respectively. After that period, however, the use of weather-boards was greatly superseded by stone and bricks in the erection of houses of a more substantial and imposing character, and these imports fell off considerably down to the year 1859; but from that time to the end of the year 1866 they represented a fluctuating annual value ranging from £271,848 to £377,458—the annual values of our imports of soft woods, since the year 1851, having been from 70 to 80 per cent. of the total amounts in the returns for all kinds of timber.

From the 1st January, 1852, to the 30th June, 1867, the Colony has expended in the purchase of foreign timber the enormous sum of £8,392,551.

* The members of the Board were Mr. C. W. Ligar, Surveyor-General; Mr. Brough Smyth, Secretary for Mines; Mr. W. W. Wardell, Inspector-General of Public Works; Mr. Thomas Couchman, Chief Mining Surveyor; Mr. Clement Hodgkinson, Assistant Commissioner of Lands and Survey.