

Victoria.

The first step in a similar direction taken by Victoria was in 1876, when an Act was passed dealing with the subject. As, however, no trained expert was appointed practical results were impossible. Bills were drafted in 1887 and 1890, but these were not even submitted to Parliament.

Finding it impossible to adequately protect the forests and to carry out their work of forest culture under the existing law, the officials of the department have appealed again and again to Ministers, pointing out that the enactments they suggest (which are practically those adopted in the Bills above referred to) are absolutely necessary to preserve valuable property of the public from the encroachment of private interests. The desired support has, however, not yet been granted.

Though, too, at the date of my appointment, and for some time after, the urgent necessity for adopting in Victoria the most approved system of modern scientific forestry was recognised by Ministers, members of Parliament, the public, and the Press, interest in the subject speedily died out; and when it was sought to enforce regulations framed to prevent waste, and especially the destruction of trees which had not reached maturity, the multitudinous claims of the sawmiller, splitter, sleeper-hewer, and especially the miner, found hosts of sympathizers in the Legislature, and the interests of the public were sacrificed in favour of private and selfish greed. Special favour, indeed, was shown to the miner, who had practically a free hand in the destruction of valuable young trees, and was allowed to wreck forests which were being specially conserved under skilled and scientific treatment. (*Vide* Inspector-General of India, in his report on Victorian forests.)

Protest after protest has also been lodged in vain against the wholesale alienation of areas which should form parts of the State forests. On the other hand, requests have been made—also in vain—for the granting for forest purposes of new areas, and for the permanent reservation of all lands under the control of the department.

These are a few of the difficulties under which the forest officials have laboured, but in spite of all obstacles good progress has been made. The value of work already done is gradually winning wider recognition, and there can be little doubt that in Victoria, as in other communities, forestry will ere long be recognised as one of the most important of State departments. Once the eyes of the people are opened to the enormous potentialities of a uniform and comprehensive scheme of forest conservation, no Government can ignore it or withhold hearty and generous support to its scientific exponents. To appoint officers who thoroughly understand their business, and then treat their profession as a mere “fad,” is to act in a manner opposed to the dictates of common-sense, and could not fail to render inoperative the best efforts of even the ablest forest authority in the world.

REQUIREMENTS OF NEW ZEALAND.

If, then, it is desired to establish forestry in New Zealand on a permanent scientific basis, it must be borne in mind that this can only be accomplished by thoroughly trained and experienced officers—that no unskilled “tinkering” can be effective. Half-measures are of no avail, and must result in failure. Forest trees take many years to mature, and mistakes at the outset, even if detected before the mischief is altogether beyond remedy, can only be rectified at enormous expense.

IGNORANT OR FACTIOUS OPPOSITION.

An error common in Australia appears to be the supposition that a man who knows how to fell a tree is a past-master in the science of forestry, and not a few officials of high standing in the colonies look upon forestry as “enthusiastic faddism,” and ignorantly assume that exercise of scientific thought and practice in connection with it is a piece of pedantic humbug. Such men seem to think that the claims of forestry to rank as a profession should be sternly repressed, and therefore, when opportunity offers, actively oppose the adoption of principles which they cannot understand, and in this manner hamper forest experts.

The existence of such views as here referred to supports the contention that if the State wishes to get full advantage from the scientific attainments of a recognised expert in forestry, such an official should be made, as far as very special legislation can make him, free, not only from political or ignorant interference, but from official blundering.

AMPLE POWERS ESSENTIAL.

Conservation of State forests cannot be effectually carried on unless the chief officer of the department is endowed with special and ample powers, so that he may be free to class the timber, demarcate the forests, and decide as only an expert can decide on the manner in which each particular area shall be worked. Cast-iron rules or regulations cannot be made to suit all cases, and considerable latitude should be allowed in the discretionary power of the Conservator. Each forest has its own peculiarities of contour, of vegetation, of climate, and of accessibility, so that hard-and-fast rules cannot be applied. Here the skill and experience of the scientist comes in.

Treated after the slipshod methods in vogue in Australia, no forests in the world could ever become practically valuable, but on the contrary must deteriorate, and hence the necessity, in order to secure more efficient development, that the authority of the Conservator should include power to check indiscriminate cutting of timber, and to control the movements of all who are licensed to use the State forests for any purpose whatever. The lack of such powers as the South Australian Government has had the foresight to confer upon the Conservator, in order that he may deal with the forests according to European method, is, I am convinced by an experience of over thirty years in the forests of Australia, the cause of the failure of more than one effort at forestry reform in these colonies. I cannot, then, repeat too often my conviction that without such powers successful and remunerative forestry cannot be maintained.

Had New Zealand followed the advice given by Captain Campbell Walker twenty years ago, in the report previously referred to, that colony would have been richer to-day by many millions of pounds, and her forests might have been models of forestal skill, instead of the wrecks they are.