

One may be pardoned for describing it as nothing less than an act of folly to invite and pay for expert opinion, and then permit the information and advice thus obtained to be set aside without sustained effort to give it effect. Such a policy in this connection is merely playing at forest conservation, and the time for such a course is, or ought to be, long gone by.

CONDITION OF NEW ZEALAND FORESTS.

The state of the New Zealand forests I found, during my recent tour, such as to urgently demand close and immediate attention. They are generally in a deplorable condition. Nothing short of drastic legislation and the prompt establishment of the department under such conditions as I have mentioned can save the timber reserves from practical extinction within the next thirty or forty years.

The settlement of people on some of the forest lands in the colony has, of course, resulted in wholesale burning, and such settlements have apparently been principal factors in the destruction of valuable timber.

THE GREAT DIFFICULTY IN NEW ZEALAND.

By far the most serious aspect of the question involved in the maintenance of the timber-supply, however, is found in the comparative absence in New Zealand forests of regenerating powers—in other words, that there is but very slow natural growth of young trees to replace those which have been destroyed. Thus, unless steps are taken to counteract this disadvantage, the forest flora of the colony is doomed, like the native races, to extinction.

The late Baron Von Mueller has pointed out that numbers of genera and species, of certain plants indigenous to Australia, have disappeared within the few years during which the country has been occupied by our race; and it is remarkable that wherever in New Zealand the sawmiller enters a forest that forest as certainly disappears. The young trees linger a few years, only to die off, or remain miserable and stunted specimens of forest growth.

This failure to recuperate by natural growth is, I find, general, and not merely local. It is therefore a subject which should engage the attention of the Government at the earliest possible moment.

Many indications point to the probability that it will be found, in consequence of this defect, better and more remunerative to replant vacant lands with valuable exotics rather than attempt to reforest with the original stock.

ESSENTIALS TO SUCCESSFUL FORESTRY.

In concluding this portion of my report, I desire to emphasize certain conditions which I consider absolutely essential to the rescue of the forests from the danger of extinction, and their successful maintenance.

These are:—

1. The equipment of your chief officer with full and ample power to utilise his special knowledge under the most favourable conditions.
2. That, since it is necessary to place implicit trust in him, the gentleman selected must be a fully qualified scientific and practical expert.
3. That he be officially commended to the loyal and active support of Parliament, the public, and the press.
4. That, even though it involve a present sacrifice, the funds placed at his disposal are as ample as circumstances will permit.
5. That once a scheme of reform has been agreed upon and adopted, it be faithfully adhered to, subject only to such modifications as practical experience of it or scientific progress may suggest.

If such conditions can be assured, it is certain, beyond the possibility of doubt, that the forests of New Zealand will become a most prolific source of wealth to her people. The state of the forests to-day fully bears out the opinions and prophecies of Captain Walker twenty years ago, and my arguments were his also. Of Professor Kirk's views I am unable to speak, as his reports are not at hand.

REPORT OF MR. B. RIBBENTROP, C.I.E., ETC.

I append, however, a valuable report by Mr. B. Ribbentrop, C.I.E., upon the Victorian forests. It contains much important information which would be of service in drafting a Forestry Bill. I therefore make no apology for embodying most of it in these pages. Mr. Ribbentrop, I may mention, as Inspector-General to the Government of India, supervises the great systems of forest conservation in that country, and is one of the highest authorities upon forestry in the British dominions. He shows how forest operations have been hampered in Victoria, and sums up the situation in a few short pithy sentences. I need hardly say that I cordially indorse his arguments and conclusions, since the reforms he urges have been fought for by me for years, though hitherto without much success. The following is the report:—

“It would be useless on my part to give a general description of the forests of the colony, as they are sufficiently well known, not merely to the authorities invested with their control, but to a considerable portion of the general public. I gathered this from numerous conversations I had on the subject during my stay in Victoria. I also found that the importance of the forests and their maintenance was generally well understood, and that it was widely acknowledged that the permanent conservation of a sufficient forest area was, and always would be, an important factor in the welfare and prosperity of the colony.

“In many countries where education (at the time forest conservancy was under consideration) was less widely spread than in the Australian Colonies, the above facts were frequently not so well understood, nor so generally acknowledged, and it became advisable to convince the public