

Baltic, American, and Indian timbers can be grown all over Australasia quite as quickly as in their native habitat, and, owing to specially-favourable climatic conditions, in many cases much more quickly. All kinds of pines, for instance, can be raised in Australasia to sawmill size—*i.e.*, 24 in. to 30 in. diameter—in a like number of years, or 1 in. in diameter for every year of growth. Under such circumstances, it appears strange that Australian Governments should hesitate to spend from £15,000 to £20,000 a year in planting and forest conservation work (which would give profitable employment to their own people) while they allow capital expended on imported timber to leave the colonies year after year at the rate of £250,000 sterling. This money, too, going to support an army of workmen sixteen thousand miles away, while our own people are starving for lack of employment. There are few trees of commercial value which (tropical flora, of course, excepted) cannot be successfully grown in these colonies, and it is therefore a simple matter to select those which are most profitable, by taking such as are invariably held in most esteem in the markets of the world. Such selection can be applied in dealing with the pumice-plain country; and, as the railway now in course of construction from Auckland to Wellington passes through the Waimarino end, and will thus increase facilities for transit, I hope to see systematic efforts undertaken to plant these plains with suitable and profitable timber, to the great advantage of this district in particular and the colony in general.

PROTECTION FROM FIRE OF STATE FORESTS AND OTHER CROWN LANDS.

Protection from damage by fire is without doubt the most urgently needed of all measures for forest reform in New Zealand, since fire has been responsible for more injury to the timber reserves than the sawmillers and all other causes combined. There must be something wrong when the Government of a country, with eyes wide open to what is going on, stands idly by while millions of pounds' worth of valuable soft woods are destroyed by this agent year after year. It is most deplorable to note, as I did during my tour in New Zealand, the ruinous destruction by fire from one end of the colony to the other. The waste of timber in this way has been simply astounding, and no country in the world could stand for any length of time such a drain upon its forests. In some districts—Hawke's Bay, for instance—vast quantities of timber have been destroyed, chiefly by fire. In this respect the greatest sinner by far and away is the pastoralist, and the insensate destruction of birch forests on hilltops and about the head-waters of rivers has been carried on to an extent which is simply amazing.

It is no wonder, under such circumstances, that flooded rivers wash out the poor unfortunate settlers miles away in the lower reaches and flats, that the Public Works Department is obliged to spend enormous sums in repairing roads and bridges, and that landslips occur not in a few isolated cases only, but in tens of thousands all over the colony. I have no desire to pose as an alarmist, but I feel bound to assert that for the Government to permit squatters or others to burn timber off from the hilltops and above the head-waters of rivers is a crime against the nation. Nature is never slow to avenge herself, and such reckless disregard of her natural conditions results in flooded farms and ruined settlers, who find not only their homes devastated, but frequently—by a sudden change in the course of a river—their land itself carried away and deposited by flood-waters in the shape of silt and shingle twenty or thirty miles below. The landslips of the Buller and other rivers attest the injury done, it may be many miles above, by firing the forests about their sources, and this firing has been done in most instances solely for the selfish reason that the sheepowner may gain a little more grass.

No doubt a great deal of such destruction is done in absolute ignorance of the national loss and flood calamities which such a course of action must entail sooner or later, and I feel that I cannot too strongly condemn the apathy of the authorities who, better informed, have permitted so cruel a wrong to national interests, or to have even, by foolish enactments, encouraged the clearing-off of bushes as improvements.

If the people of New Zealand need proof that the relations of effect to cause have been correctly stated, let the sceptical study the present conditions of forestry in France, and they will learn that hundreds of thousands—nay millions—of pounds are being spent to reforest mountain-slopes simply to save the rich arable lands below from utter ruin; that some of the first engineers in the country have been engaged to erect extensive masonry works to keep flood-waters within fixed limits; that the most talented officers of the departments have been backed by the French Treasury in spending enormous sums upon this work. And why? Because at a former period just such a system as that now prevailing in New Zealand was permitted to denude the slopes of the Alps and other ranges; even the scrub which escaped other hands being stripped for firewood by the peasants. Miles upon miles of the richest land in France, in the beautiful agricultural country of the Gironde district, was covered many feet deep with silt, rubble, and shingle, and thousands of people ruined. Great gullies appeared in the slopes where none had existed before, and watercourses were opened up all over the mountains, down which the torrents of water carried billions of tons of silt, &c., over the farm-lands below, till at last the Government grasped the position, and the works above referred to were undertaken, to control the water and prevent further landslips. And France represents only one of many instances in which early neglect of forest conservation has resulted in tremendous material loss and enormous expenditure to repair damages.

Colonists in the Middle Island of New Zealand have indeed only to use their eyes, and they can see for themselves the evil effect of the system I condemn so vehemently. It is surely unnecessary in this case, then, to quote authorities, since object-lessons by the thousand lie before the eyes of the observer. But if the treatment of bush-lands in the Middle Island has been bad, that in the North Island, with its warmer climate and semi-tropical vegetation, has been criminal.