

Some planting has been done for the Mines Department on the land surrounding the Elweburn Reservoir, Maniototo; but the results are not altogether satisfactory, owing to rabbits being allowed to enter since our connection therewith terminated.

For the purpose of testing the growth of catalpa, sugar-maple, blackwood, and the more valuable eucalypti, such as jarrah, ironbark, and spotted gum, a block of 69 acres has been acquired from the Railway Department at Ruatangata, some four miles north of Whangarei. Twenty-seven acres of this is at present being cleared with the object of forming a nursery later on, while the remainder will be utilised as an experimental ground. Amongst other useful trees to be put on their trial here are cork-oak (*Quercus suber*), totara (*Podocarpus totara*), and puriri (*Vitex littoralis*), and possibly a few more of our most valuable native timber trees.

It is probable that another small area in the Pupipuhi Block will be set aside as an experimental station for the class of trees above mentioned. Here there are some 10,000 acres of forest reserve at present leased for grazing purposes which can be resumed as required, when the varieties of trees found most suitable for extensive artificial planting are determined.

Nurserymen's cottages and office accommodation are urgently required at Tapanui, Starborough, and Rotorua, and premises for workmen's living-apartments are necessary at all nurseries.

Work-sheds for sizing, counting, and bundling trees should be provided at the four nurseries before next winter, as this work can be more successfully carried on during weather unfit for outdoor labour.

As mentioned in last year's report, the outline of a scheme for more vigorous conservation of our remaining forests and extending planting operations has been prepared and submitted for approval. Suggestions have also been made for the control of scenic, climatic, and other reserves, many of which are at present being destroyed by stock and fire, which necessarily imply man. The necessity for prolonging the present volume of our timber-trade should be a sufficient reason for a more rigorous, rational, and economical system of forest-conservation, as artificial plantations now being made cannot be expected to yield mature timber for ordinary sawmilling purposes in less than sixty and possibly eighty years, a period far beyond that when our native forest will become exhausted—except, probably, for inferior classes of timber.

The preservation of natural scenery is of little less importance than forest-conservation if our colony is to maintain (far less increase) its growing popularity as a tourist resort, and yet practically nothing is being done to prevent the destruction of our beauty-spots, which suffer more or less annually through the ravages of stock and fire. Some provision seems desirable to enable the Crown to acquire (or have permanently set apart) picturesque spots on Native lands in the hands of Maori Councils now being dealt with for settlement. At present one of the finest pieces of bush scenery in the colony is threatened with total destruction through the Native owners selling the timber to a sawmilling company. The locality referred to is Matawhaura Bluff and the famous Hongi's Tract, between Lakes Rotoiti and Rotoehu.

In regard to climatic reserves and catchment-areas, there is, perhaps, no more important question that so profoundly affects our material welfare and future prosperity as that of a pure, copious, and enduring water-supply for domestic and industrial purposes. Any conditions which result in impairing the supply must be viewed with apprehension, and the one and only remedy is conservation of forest-clad areas. The diminution and threatened extinction of forests can only result disastrously to our towns—fatally to our commercial prosperity. A step in advance has, however, been decided on in regard to extending tree-planting operations. In place of producing the present annual output of two million trees from the four nurseries, arrangements have been made to increase the number to five million, and seeds estimated to grow that quantity have already been ordered. In the meantime the extra number will be raised at Rotorua Nursery, with the object of utilising the present unremunerative areas of pumice lands for planting purposes. With this object in view, a block of some 2,000 acres has been selected at Waiotapu, immediately adjoining the present prison-camp plantations. This land will be fenced by prison labour during the year.

As the Crown lands of the colony are being rapidly taken up for settlement, the question of reserving large areas for planting purposes is apt to be overlooked, but the matter deserves urgent and careful consideration. Legislation may be desirable to enable the Crown to acquire suitable blocks of private lands or to utilise portions of estates resumed for settlement for the purpose of making plantations in close proximity to farming districts, not only to provide timber for the use of settlers, but to act as shelter for agricultural areas, the benefits of which are too well known to require further comment.

Instructions have been received to prepare a "Treatise on Forestry" for the use of settlers, which work is well in hand, although frequent interruptions by ordinary duties are not conducive to satisfactory results. This production is intended to supply authentic information on the raising of trees either from seeds or cuttings, suggestions and instructions to would-be planters as to suitable trees for planting on different soils and in varying climates, also lists of desirable trees for shelter, timber purposes, and ornament. The work will be fully illustrated with some of the principal shelter and timber trees, as well as photographs of seed-beds showing the different stages from sowing to planting.

The esteem and popularity in which this branch of the Department is held, and the general interest it has aroused throughout the colony, is evidenced by the increasing number of visitors to the nurseries, and the voluminous correspondence which has grown up therewith during the seven years of its existence.

The reports which follow, on the nurseries and plantations, it will be observed, are by the officers in charge of various stations, this system being deemed preferable to brief summaries as heretofore.

Details of expenditure, values, trees, &c., from 1896 to date, are appended.