

5. PRESERVATION OF FORESTS FOR SCENIC PURPOSES.

For a number of years past the fact that in our scenery we have a source of much wealth has been slowly becoming recognised by the public, so that at the present time there is hardly any one prepared to assert the contrary. Now, it is the *special character* of the scenery which constitutes its attraction to visitor, and this depends altogether upon the plant-covering of the land. Moreover, this covering is not artificial, as is that of Europe generally, where the forests have been planted by man, or at any rate much modified, and even the mountain-meadows altogether changed by the grazing of animals. The vegetation is in fact primeval; New Zealand, where unmeddled-with, being really a piece of the primitive world just as planted by Nature. Also, the vegetation is absolutely different from that of any other land, as shown by the fact that out of about sixteen hundred species of the higher plants (ferns, lycopods, trees, shrubs, herbs) the astonishing number of one thousand one hundred and seventy-two are found nowhere else in the world, and yearly discoveries of unnamed species may be expected to swell this total. These plants have been combined by Nature into distinct plant-societies, each with its special physiognomy, and it is these which form the characteristic dressing of the land, giving the scenery the distinctive New Zealand stamp. In the above regard the forests play the major part. The majestic Sounds of Otago, the delightful inlets of Stewart Island, the defiles of the Southern Alps—these owe their colouring, their special character, their peculiar charm to the forest covering. The standing forest of such places is of little moment for commercial purposes: its larger trees once removed, they will only be replaced after a long interval, or not at all: any damage will change the character of the scene, and the value be accordingly lessened. Moreover, the land, were the forest once destroyed, would be worthless, while denudation, moving *débris*, floods, and drought would follow. Over the length and breadth of New Zealand are large areas of mountain-forest serving a splendid purpose both from the climatic and scenic standpoint, and their perpetual preservation is eminently desirable. But against this is the opinion of some that trees are of no value except for timber and firewood, and cumber the ground; that when they cannot be utilised they are best cut down and burnt. Such a policy I have already attempted to show would in many cases be disastrous, and it seems to me that no forest-area on the mountains should be meddled with without grave reasons, and that the National Parks and scenic reserves should be guarded with jealous care. If there be one action of New Zealand which in every civilised country is being applauded as eminently wise and sane, it is the having set aside these special reserves.

But, apart from what is generally included under the category of scenery, come in those plant-associations whose like not only is not elsewhere, but which for certain reasons bid fair to become extinct. A case in point is that association known as the kauri forest. This is not only peculiar to New Zealand, but is confined to a limited region in the north. Not only, too, is it of extreme commercial value, but a virgin kauri forest both from within and without is a truly magnificent spectacle—almost the finest, so far as forest scenery is concerned, that the world can show. At the rate at which the trees are now being felled, in a few years' time there will be no *virgin* kauri forest in existence. But the State still possesses to the south of Hokianga, and growing for the most part upon poor ground, ill-adapted for settlement, a considerable area of virgin forest, the Waipoua. Some short time ago I expressed my conviction that this noble tree-association was of more importance standing as it is than if it were converted into timber, in the following words:—

“The Waipoua Forest and one or two other smaller reserves are the only virgin kauri forests now belonging to the State. The kauri forest, as I have already stated, is the only plant-association of the kind to be found in the world. I have also attempted to show that it is one of great beauty and of extreme scientific interest. The forest reserve contains examples of 241 species of flowering-plants and ferns. It is therefore at present an important forest museum. Before very long, at the rate at which the kauri is being converted, there will be no forests of that kind, and very few examples of the trees either—in twenty years' time, or even less. Thus will pass away for ever from the face of the earth one of the noblest of forests and one of the unique attractions of New Zealand. Our fiords, glaciers, and hot springs have their like elsewhere; our kauri forests are nowhere else to be seen. What the future of the Waipoua Forest will be I cannot pretend to predict. If it is felled it will give employment for a few years to a certain number of men, who in any case at the end of that time will have to look for other employment, and in its place will be much waste land and a few farms, isolated from other settlement. If it is preserved there will be a magnificent heritage for future generations, and an attraction, constantly increasing in its interest, for the visitors to our shores.”

Other special classes of forest have also a claim for preservation, but generally speaking such is provided for in the great National Parks and certain of the scenic reserves. One park, the Waimakariri,* is an exception. Unfortunately, before the reserve was proclaimed the forest-clad portion had been constituted a forest reserve, and so, although within the limits of the park, timber can be removed. Such might quite well be the case before long, notwithstanding that the forest only consists of the at present valueless mountain-beech (*Nothofagus cliffortioides*), since it abuts for some miles on what will be the Midland Railway line. The preservation of this special forest is distinctly of national importance to the Dominion. In the first place, it covers those high mountains whence issue the various sources of the River Waimakariri, and its destruction would undoubtedly lead to frequent and disastrous floods in that great river, dangerous not only to the farm lands of the Canterbury Plain but to the City of Christchurch itself. Further, the railway-line, which in many places will be none too secure, would be endangered a hundredfold were the slopes over which it winds denuded of trees. Finally, the scenery of the Waimakariri National Park is of the highest character. With the extension of the railway to the Cass there will be opened up shortly a splendid holiday resort and natural sanatorium.

* Mentioned in Scenery Preservation Report under title of “Arthur's Pass National Park”; but that pass and its environs form merely a fraction of the area, which includes virtually the whole northern watershed of the Waimakariri.