

This last sentence contains a reference to what is by far the most serious danger by which the world's existing timber-supply is threatened—the menace of fire. But, contrary to the general belief, a great deal can be done by care and proper organization to combat this peril effectively. In the opinion of a great many people who have had much to do with timber, it is impracticable to protect standing bush against the ravages of fire. Thus the Hon. E. Mitchelson, giving evidence before the Timber Commission in Auckland recently, gave it as his opinion that it would be quite impossible to preserve kauri bush unless it were surrounded by a very large area of mixed bush, because of its inflammable nature; and Mr. H. P. Kavanagh, Chief Timber Expert for Auckland District, also told the Commission that it is impossible to save kauri-bush owing to its susceptibility to fire. Now, admitting the wide experience of these gentlemen, I would like to point out that the same opinion has been often advanced in other countries as to the impossibility of saving standing bush, and it has frequently been disproved by practical experiment.

Let us take the case of fire-fighting in America, where the enormous extent of the forests and the roughness of the ground inside the timber-belts would seem to render bush-saving an impossible task. Yet, as the result of careful precautions and the regular employment of a large staff of men, whose special duty it is to watch for and extinguish forest-fires, the losses from fire inside the national forest reserves—covering an area of 160,000,000 acres—have been reduced to a remarkably small figure. Thus, in 1906 it was officially reported that less than one-eighth of the national forests had been burned over, and that three one-hundredths of 1 per cent.—about one three-thousandth part—had been destroyed. The total loss was less than £20,000; yet it is calculated that the United States has been losing on an average about £10,000,000 a year in marketable timber for a long time past through fire alone. And the remarkable results recorded inside the national forest-area have been secured without any extraordinary outlay. The expenditure, in fact, bears no appreciable relation to the value of the work done. Returns furnished by the American Department of Agriculture show that the southern forests can be patrolled effectively against fire for 2 cents an acre per year; the northern forests for not more than 4 cents, and those of the Rocky Mountains and of the Pacific Coast for 1½ cents, an acre per year. Considering the value of the property thus protected, and the large proportion of it that would otherwise be annually destroyed by fire, the expense of fire-fighting is absolutely trivial. And it is not unreasonable to infer that the work done so cheaply under such difficult conditions and over so vast an area in America could be performed quite as effectively and as cheaply in New Zealand if a systematic attempt was made to apply the same methods here.

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