

THE BUSH CONFERENCE

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WHEN the depression first made its appearance, we here in New Zealand were prone to refer to Australia as being in a bad way. At first the public in this country did not realise that they were in the same boat, and that Australia, owing to having much greater recuperative powers economically, would be the first to get out of the bog.

Now we are prone to hold up our hands in horror when we hear about the terrible floods and dust storms which are occurring in America owing to the depletion of her forests on watersheds. We are failing to notice, for the time being, that we here in New Zealand are if anything in a worse plight, simply because we have less forest-covered land in proportion to our land area than America has, and because we are a mountainous island country. America is a vast continent, mainly flat. Aotearoa, as the Maori name indicates, is a long narrow country, rising steeply out from very deep seas. The alluvial soil is therefore quickly carried by swift rivers and streams into and under the sea, and the sea does not give it back. In countries where the rivers flow into shallow seas, some giving-back of soil, in the form of sand, does take place, and reclamation results. But our soil, washed into deep water, returns not. Its fertility is lost; its reclaiming value is nil.

It is sincerely to be hoped that the Bush Conference will be the forerunner of a great awakening on the part of the public of New Zealand and that they will quickly realise the situation.

The case is, however, different with a land where the adjacent seas are shallow, or where the area is so extensive that sufficient soil can be supplied to reclaim seas. In South Africa, for instance, in the Transvaal, and the Orange Free State, where vast herds of many species of deer once roamed, there are countless small hills called kopjes dotted over the countryside. These are merely hard rocky formations which have resisted the forces of erosion in a greater degree than the surrounding alluvial soil. The softer earth covering in Southern Africa has been carried down the Vaal, Limpopo and Zambesi Rivers to form a rich coastal belt shelving into shallow seas which extend many miles out to sea, no doubt made shallow as the result of the depositing of the inland soil for centuries.

His Excellency the Governor-General and the Hon. Messrs. Langstone, Parry, and Semple have given the public a vigorous lead by drawing their attention to the matter of forest depletion and made some very candid remarks on the subject. Nothing can succeed, however, without public sympathy. It is now up to the general public to back their leaders up not only by insisting upon adequate legislation and action on the part of the authorities, but by showing that they—the public—realise the gravity of the position. By their action and help the public can show that they will not tolerate any further loss of native bush unless a sound forest policy is adopted, ensuring the replacement of any forest destroyed, and eventually the re-clothing of those lands which should never have been deforested. Let us all follow the fine example of the many who paid their own expenses, in some cases from remote districts, in order to attend the recent Bush Conference. They gave their time and money in the interests of their native land.