

THE DESTROYERS

RUIN OF MOUNTAIN FORESTS CONTINUES

IN spite of all that has been said and written about the criminal folly of permitting sawmillers and settlers to strip the indigenous forest off the high places, the work of ruin still goes on. There are sawmillers operating in areas of bush more than two thousand feet above sea level, and in some places three thousand feet. These places are forests which should be saved from interference in any form because they are so obviously natural protection forests, saving the soil from erosion, protecting the sources of rivers, shielding the cultivation areas lower down and forming climatic guards, and adorning the country as no works of man can adorn it.

But no restraining hand is laid on the destroyers. Timber felling is going on to-day on mountain ranges which form the collecting areas for town water supplies, and which will be reduced to wild weed-infested desolation as soon as the garment of bush is removed.

In spite of all the appeals made in the newspapers and the publications of the Forest and Bird Protection Society, no scientific plan has yet been formulated for the preservation of our forests. It is next to useless to make a scenic or a forest reserve here or there. These scraps saved from the general ruin are small and isolated and are likely to deteriorate.

There would be some scientific conservation value in a policy which strictly forbade any timber-felling on native forest areas more than, say, a thousand feet above sea level, or above a certain grade of steepness. This would cut out, of course, many timber mills now operating but it would be to the enormous benefit of the country. The King Country ranges, ravaged everywhere, the Kaimai hills between the upper Thames and Tauranga, where the bush is being destroyed as high as 1,500 feet, the Mamaku hills and tableland, the watersheds of the Wanganui, the Mokau, the Waipa, and a hundred other streams; such mountains as Pirongia

and Maungatautari, should never have been touched by sawmillers or the all-destroying farmer.

The haste displayed by Governments in the past in disposing of bush-covered steep ranges to settlers for clearance was responsible for a vast amount of destruction; but the amazing thing is that the lessons of the past have not yet had their due effect. Commercial interests still have their way and work their will.

Those who would save the forests seem singularly helpless. Example, the Waitakere Ranges, Auckland's Blue Mountains. Auckland wants and needs that area of hill and forest as a park, but private interests prevail and the bush is coming down. Immediately it became known that the city desired the bush for the public's use, in rushed the tree-fellers and the miller. Action by the State and by civic bodies to acquire the private interests should have been taken long ago; as it is now, all that will remain for the city and the nation will be a hacked and mutilated ruin of a once glorious place of hills and streams and bush. This fate has already overtaken the Akatarewa water supply ranges, Wellington.

The milling of the bush on Tongariro Mountain, at an altitude of three thousand feet, has repeatedly been described and brought to the attention of the Government. The Tongariro National Park Board could have acquired this from the Maori owners long ago, and saved it for the perpetual benefit and enjoyment of the Pakeha-and-Maori nation. It could have been added to the park area, by negotiation, before the sawmillers reached out greedy hands for it. The money spent on superfluous works near the Chateau could have been devoted to the acquisition of these timber rights, and so have saved a beautiful tract of forest, the natural protective belt along the northern face of the range. But not a word about it from the Board. Does such a body still exist?