

## "BURNING OFF." A SCANDALOUS WASTE OF TIMBER.

IT is no exaggeration to describe as criminal the practice which still continues of felling and burning indigenous forest in order to replace it with grass. It is a crime against the country; the landowner or the lessee of Crown land or Native land who deliberately sets fire to bush simply to clear the land is not only guilty of destroying valuable property but is committing a grave anti-social offence. There may be no law to prevent it; it is none the less a crime against the wellbeing of a land which is already in great need of the timber and is far too sparsely forested.

It seems extraordinary after all that has been spoken and written about the folly of the crude "burning-off" methods, that the ignorant and uneconomic practice is still carried on in some places, as if the native bush were just a cumbering of the ground.

The occurrence reported from Dargaville in the middle of January appears to call for action by the Government. In spite of warning by the Forest Service, a block of some seventy acres of felled bush adjoining the southern side of the Waipoua Kauri Forest was set fire to, with the result that twenty men under the officer in charge of the State Forest spent two strenuous days fighting the flames and preventing the fire from crossing the boundary. It was stated that the owner of the felled timber had been refused permission to light any bush within an area contiguous to Waipoua, because of the dry weather and the consequent danger to the kauri forest. All settlers there, in fact, had been warned not to set the bush on fire. Yet someone did, with very grave danger to the national forest.

Apart from the obvious risk of damage to the Waipoua State Forest—which should long ago have been proclaimed a national sanctuary—there is the injury to the country's indigenous timber resources involved in this bad old habit of chop-saw-and-burn. If the felled timber were milled and turned to account in that way, there would be some sense in it, some justification for the felling. But simply to destroy everything, to make a clean sweep of the bush with fire, is simply wicked waste.

It does not matter whether it is privately owned or not. No landowner or occupier can be allowed to be a law unto himself. There is

some antiquated legislative provision about giving notice to neighbours before burning off. That is absurdly inadequate and out of date now. Notice or no notice, felling timber simply to reduce it to ashes is a relic of the bad old past settlement of New Zealand. There is a vast amount of tree waste in the ordinary operations of the sawmillers. There is an infinitely more deplorable spectacle when a tract of bush is given over to fire-raisers. "A good burn-off"—too familiar phrase—stands for a disgraceful squandering of the country's natural wealth.

---

### FORESTRY IN ENGLAND.

One who should openly follow our "cut out and get out" method for the sake only of money getting would be considered unpatriotic, disloyal, and undesirable for social recognition. Private ownership as a public trust is widely recognised in England.—Philip W. Ayres, in "American Forests."

---

### ROADS *versus* WILD-LIFE.

To build a road is so much simpler than to think of what the country really needs. A roadless marsh is seemingly as worthless to the alphabetical conservationists as an undrained one was to the empire-builders. Solitude, the one natural resource still undowered of alphabets, is so far recognised as valuable only by ornithologists and cranes.

Thus always does history, whether of marsh or market-place, mice or men, end in paradox. The ultimate value in these marshes is wildness, and the crane is wildness incarnate. But all conservation of wildness is self-defeating, for to cherish we must see and fondle, and when enough have seen and fondled, there is nothing left to cherish.

Some day, perhaps in the very process of our benefactions, perhaps in the fulness of geologic time, the last crane will trumpet his farewell and spiral skyward from the great marsh. High out of the clouds will fall the sound of hunting horns, the baying of the phantom pack, the tinkle of little bells, and then a silence never to be broken, unless perchance in some far pasture of the Milky Way.—Aldo Leopold, in "American Forests."