

DEFENDER OF THE FOREST. "GREY OWL'S" PHILOSOPHY.

A recent cable message reported the death of the famous Canadian-Indian naturalist, forest ranger and writer, part Indian of blood, who bore the name signifying Grey Owl. His home was in the Saskatchewan country, where in recent years he held a Government position as wildlife guardian that was a fitting recognition of his enthusiasm for the preservation unspoiled of the great forest reserves and their inhabitants. Grey Owl's writings, in such books as "Tales of an Empty Cabin," have, or should have, a strong appeal for New Zealanders, for he gave expression in a simple but very eloquent way to the earnest love of a son of the wilds for all the life of the forest, river and lake as he knew it. He had been a trapper for the fur trade until he decided to become a protector rather than a hunter. He was a "Hawkeye" with his rifle, and in the World War he found his special place as a sniper with the Canadian Forces; but when he returned to the far-out Indian country he used rifle and gun against wolves and other destroyers that threatened his beloved beavers.

Some passages from Grey Owl's last book hold a special interest for New Zealanders, for although our bush and its life are different from Canada's, the same broad principles of conservation apply to both. He condemned with all the power of his pen the commercial spirit carried to the point of selfish destruction in the woodland country. Some people "see nothing but so many feet of board measure in the most magnificent tree that ever stood." He realised and explained the distinction between commercial purposes forests and those which should be preserved strictly against sawmillers.

"There are many reasons, aesthetic, economic and patriotic," he said, "for the perpetuation of large tracts of unspoiled original timber—exclusive of reforestation. This last scheme should be carried on intensively, and

commercial concerns should be obliged (and many of them do, to their credit) to plant six or a dozen trees for every one they cut, thus putting in their own crop, and so be made to keep their acquisitive eyes off some of Canada's remaining beauty spots, which will be ruined irretrievably if commerce has its way with them. There is plenty for all purposes."

"LUMBERMAN'S LEAVINGS."

The great natural scenery of Canada, Grey Owl wrote in another chapter, had made the tourist traffic one of the country's foremost industries. He emphasised the quality "natural" as applied to the forests. "I mean natural, real forests of trees, not burnt-over areas or lumberman's leavings. Forests to fill the requirements are not spindling second growth."

That replacement, or regeneration, of the native forest that the Indian woodsman urges, is a duty which New Zealand has quite neglected so far. As for "lumberman's leavings," that accurately describes many State-owned places that should have been saved in their unspoiled condition. There are so-called scenic forests, along the main routes of travel, that are simply wreckage of the original forest. The Mamaku Bush, on the Rotorua line, and that bordering the Main Trunk line between Taumarunui and Ohakune, would be world-famous for their beauty had the Governments of the past taken any trouble to save them from the general ruin. There, if anywhere, the large trees, the splendid rimu and totara especially, should have been left untouched. There was plenty to mill elsewhere. Now, after the reserves have been run through by State and private sawmillers alike, there is no place anywhere on our railway lines where the traveller can find in its original state a bit of the New Zealand bush he has come so far to see.

The Track of the Mill.

