

industries, since the failure of the supply of timber, from whatever cause, would mean the crushing out of not only a few, but of every one of our industries. We may then begin to imagine what such a result would mean; I say begin to imagine, for we certainly cannot realize what would be the real consequences. Let us emphasize this fact as strongly as possible: there is no one of our industries which could live for twenty-four hours, or would be worth twenty-four pence purchase money independent of wood in some form or other. And if the industries are so dependent, our whole civilization is also dependent. All past and present experience shows clearly that wood is a first necessity in man's home and habitation, and in this Dominion it is safe to say that ninety per cent. of our houses are mainly composed of it, while it is an indispensable factor in the remaining ten per cent., as well as in the furniture and fittings of both home and business premises.

#### THE QUESTION OF A SUBSTITUTE FOR WOOD

We may be told that as timber becomes scarcer a substitute will be found, and that already steel and concrete are being largely used for purposes of construction, but we have to remember that wood is largely used in placing other materials in position, and that every pound of metal, and of mineral involves the use of wood in its mining, its milling, its transport, and its working into shape, while the price of the substitute, like that of the original material would be governed by the law of supply and demand, and might soon be greater than that of the material for which it might be substituted. The commercial importance of a timber supply at a cheap rate is also made more evident when we consider that at every turn, and on every hand business is dependent on a railway system in which wood is an absolute necessity. These are but a few illustrations of the fact that every function of business or of pleasure and comfort depend in one way or another on our timber supply, and that without such a supply of an adequate character civilization as we know it would entirely break down. It becomes then, a question of what is to be done to avert such disastrous consequences as further neglect must inevitably bring, and who is to take the matter in hand? It should not require much argument to prove that, even from no higher motives than self interest the commercial man should be among the first to make a move. And it must be remembered that provision has to be made, not only for the use of wood in such quantities and forms as suit present needs, for experience shows that the consumption of that material per head per annum of the world's population is always on the increase, seeing that there are constantly increasing outlets for human energy and employment, due to the rapid increase and spread of scientific knowledge in relation to trade. There is the further need for action from the fact of the great increase of the world's population, that is to say that portion of it coming under the scope of what is commonly known as Western civilization, which is constantly altering the ratio between supply and demand to the disadvantage of the former.

#### ENORMOUS WASTE OF WOOD

Not much good can come of lamenting over the past except to make use of such a proceeding as a warning for the future, and in that respect we may do well to consider the enormous waste which has been made, and how such may be avoided in the future.

It has been well said that "the natural resources "of the earth have in all ages, and in all countries, "been squandered by man with a wanton disregard "of the future," and probably in no country has this process been carried on, in modern times, to a greater extent than here in New Zealand, where in regard to the tree the full force of the old Scriptural anathema, "cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground," has found a most literal interpretation. How then is this waste to be stopped, and how are we to make good the destruction of the past? Fortunately there is now coming about a more general recognition of the unwisdom of past neglect, and the need for better methods for the future. An illustration of this is shown in the fact of the subject of Afforestation being before this meeting to-day.

#### WHAT OTHERS ARE DOING

A brief notice of what has been done and is now going on in other parts of the Empire, and in America in regard to the future will be helpful as indicating the views and opinions of men of special knowledge and of world-wide repute in connection with the subject. Taking the finding of the British Royal Commission on Coast Erosion and Afforestation 1909, as the result of by far the most comprehensive and systematic enquiry that has been made since the awakening began, we find in the report of the Commission a synopsis of the principal conclusions, the first on the list being in these words: "Afforestation is practicable and desirable." Later we read: "Any scheme of national afforestation should be on an economic basis." From a financial point of view we are told: "Afforestation represents a productive investment, and should be financed by a loan." And as to the question of administration and control, the finding of the Commission is: "The afforestation scheme to be entrusted to a special board of commissioners." This latter recommendation is specially enlarged upon in the more extended portion of the report. As an incidental effect of such an enterprise the report says:—"Afforestation creates a new industry, it does not compete with private enterprise. The conversion of comparatively unprofitable lands into forests enhances the productivity of adjacent areas." "More than any other apparent remedy afforestation will stem the tide of rural depopulation." The report also says:—"Owing to the present scarcity of timber, and the probable rise in prices, the prospects of afforestation are very encouraging." And on the question of comparative prices the witnesses are agreed that "timber has undergone a marked augmentation in value in recent years, which rise in price has been accompanied by a more or less marked reduction in quality."

In the evidence before the commission I will quote but two which are typical of the whole. Sir