

## State Forestry.

### Urgent Need for Action.

#### Native Woods or Exotics?

An interesting paper, written by Mr S. I. Clarke, of Auckland, urging the immediate need for adequate steps to maintain and increase the timber supply of the Dominion, was read at the annual meeting of the Industrial Corporation of New Zealand. The writer pointed out that of the natural products outside those relating to food no material was so universally in use in the daily life of the community as was wood in its various forms and conditions. Although other materials were being substituted for wood, yet in the aggregate the consumption was daily increasing in volume and value—indeed, in the preparation and distribution of these substitutes themselves wood itself was a necessary element. Failure of our natural forests as a source of supply in the near future was certain unless something were quickly done to prevent it, and it was very fortunate that we were beginning to realise the necessity for the reconstruction and examination of our supplies, and that the subject was too important to be left to chance or the uncertainties of private effort. The State was the only power competent to deal with such a vast proposition on such a scale as would banish all fear of the national disaster which must result if the Dominion's timber supplies remained subject to destructive influences only, and nothing were done towards their regeneration or renewal. The folly of trusting to supplies from overseas had been too clearly illustrated during the war to require further demonstration.

Though it was evident that an adequate supply of marketable timber could only be supplied in the future by State control, the application of the remedy was by no means a simple matter, for the question arose of how best to maintain economy of national resources, and to supplement them with such human aid as would make for stability of trade and the national welfare. There was a tendency to surround the case with an air of mystery, and to pretend that a vast amount of special study and scientific research was a necessary equipment for tree-growing, once it was dubbed with the charmed name of forestry; but there did not appear to be need for anything more than ordinary business sense in the matter—it was nonsense to assume that we must wait for elaborate instruction in elementary work, the success of which was mainly dependent on local experience and observation.

A point of difference was the basis of the forestry plan—whether it should be the reconstruction of native bush, its transformation by the introduction of foreign elements, or the creation of cultivated forest of foreign origin, consisting of woods selected on account of their proved value, and their capacity of production within the bounds of economic success. The question of what trees were likely to be of the greatest use should be submitted to the

judgment and consideration of men of practical and business knowledge of the commercial timbers of the world, and especially of indigenous woods, for serious mistakes might be made as the result of general comparisons and conclusions in the absence of that particular knowledge upon which the value of those conclusions rested. It had been stated that our trees were practically all coniferous soft wood, the class of forest that supplies nine-tenths of all the timber used in the world, but this conveyed a wrong impression. Botanically, a number of our conifers belonged to a tribe of conifers quite separate and distinct from the true pines, spruces and firs of the northern hemisphere, and with the exception of the kauri none of our timbers used in construction work could be taken for the soft woods of the old world; and with one exception they were not on the same level of general utility, for timbers suitable for construction purposes found in payable quantities were few in number, and were vanishing at such a rate as to constitute a cause for serious alarm.

On the other hand, an equal number of exotics could be selected, giving much better promise in the matter of rapidity of growth, volume of returns, ease and lightness in working, strength and durability, all important economic factors.

Thus, though we would do well to conserve our natural forests as far as possible for the provision of an expanding trade and an increasing population, our main hope was in a properly equipped and and well managed system of cultivated forests. The writer was aware that this was not in accord with certain overseas advice tendered to New Zealand, but he refused to accept the possibility suggested in that advice of a constant stream of profit to the extent of £10 per acre a year, to be made from the growing of kauri, nor did he accept the suggestion that we should go to Prussia for inspiration and example. Such authorities as E. P. Stebbing, head of the Forestry Department of the Edinburgh University, and Dr. Fernow, director of the New York State College of Forestry, roundly condemned Prussian forestry methods.

After the paper had been read, Mr S. J. Harbutt (Auckland) moved:—"That this meeting views with alarm the lessening of the native timber supply of the Dominion, and the continued rise in the price of timber, whereby the industries of the Dominion, both primary and secondary, are being disastrously affected. It is agreed that urgent representations to be made to the Government to place an export duty of at least 5/- per 100ft. on all kinds of timbers exported from the Dominion. That this meeting, while appreciating the formation of the Department of Forestry, expresses a hope that most active steps will be taken in establishing exotic soft-wood forests, comprised of such species as *pinus parice*, *pinus radiata*, and others calculated to provide the earliest possible supply of timber for the industries of the Dominion. That the most urgent measures be enforced to preserve the remaining native timber supply."