

largest firms in New Zealand have found it very difficult to carry on with stocks accumulating, with banks pressing for reduction of overdrafts, and with no apparent outlet for the goods arriving. The seriousness of the situation can hardly be under-estimated, and it says a great deal for the old-established firms here that they have been able to weather the storm as they have."

THE FORESTRY SERVICE.

Forestry policy is not suffering to-day from under-advertisement. The work of the New Zealand Forestry League is getting the public well interested in the question, while the new Forestry Department seems quite capable of displaying its advantages in cold print. The first annual report of the Department presented to Parliament contains much interesting information about possibilities. It is explained that the past year has been one of preparation, but that the year to end on March 31st, 1923, will be one of fruition and results. The Department has secured a fairly large staff, and some of its immediately practical applications have been in the direction of emphasising the fact that there are varieties of New Zealand timber suited for nearly all commercial requirements. Numerous inquiries regarding other specialised uses of various timbers indicate that the local markets show preference for the New Zealand manufactures where available rather than for the imported article. The work of advising on such inquiries is, however, states the report, hampered by the lack of information regarding the physical and mechanical properties of practically all the New Zealand grown timbers. This state of affairs, coupled with the length of time required to obtain a report on such matters as wood-pulping, stresses the necessity of establishing a forest products laboratory to conduct such research. If any evidence were needed of the fact that timber millers were not given the same opportunity of charging "world parity" prices the Forestry report provides it:—"The demand for timber during the year was not reflected in prices, as would ordinarily be the case under usual trade conditions, for during the whole period the prices have been subject to control by the Board of Trade, so that a review of prices in relation to the year's trade conditions is not called for. This, of course, refers only to trade within New Zealand, for it is quite well known that the prices secured for timber exported to Australia during the greater part of the year were considerably higher than those permitted to be charged locally."

A DRASTIC BILL MODIFIED.

There has been so much wanton and careless destruction of valuable timber in New Zealand through forest fires, etc., that the Forestry Commissioner, Sir Francis Bell, submitted to Parliament a measure which provided very drastic penalties for this class of offence. However, the Forestry Bill had to be submitted to the Lands Committee,

which is strongly representative of the farming interests in the House, with the result that the really drastic clauses were torn out, or reduced to a very unoffending shape from the point of view of prospective law-breakers. One year's imprisonment or a fine of £100 was frequently indicated in the penal clauses of the Bill as it went to the Lands Committee, but the fine was reduced to "not exceeding" £50, and the possibility of imprisonment almost completely removed. It was sought originally to give forest rangers power to arrest trespassers, but this was simply thrown out by the Committee. The farmers on the Lands Committee might have had some justification for toning down the penalties in general, but they showed complete class prejudice in their own interests when they deleted, without any alternative provision, Clause 40, which made it an offence to unlawfully depasture stock (which is very destructive to the growth in a forest reserve), or to hunt game, liberate animals, or to occupy, clear or break up any land for cultivation or other purpose in a reserved area. This class of offence ought certainly to be prevented, and we hope to see the House, when it deals with the Bill, insert another clause which bears at least some semblance to the original. Although it is the general practice in Canada and America to conscript all labour in vicinity of a forest fire, to get the outbreak in hand, the Forestry Department showed bad judgment in suggesting such a conscription proposal to the New Zealand Parliament, especially as it did not provide any satisfactory guarantee that the conscripted labour would be properly paid. Of course the Lands Committee threw out this clause, which helped to create the impression that the Bill had been drafted without proper appreciation of New Zealand conditions. However, a measure to protect our forests is badly needed, and we hope it will be something more substantial than the remnants of the Forest Bill left by the Lands Committee. It is reported, as we go to press, that the Bill will secure a further—and let us hope a more discriminating—overhaul by another Select Committee specially appointed for the purpose. Certainly a mistake was made in leaving it to the mercy of a collection of members mainly interested in securing land for settlement as cheaply as possible. Though many farmers are enthusiastic advocates of a sound forestry policy, quite a number show absolutely no realisation of the value of any growth but grass, except for shelter purposes. The many scenic reserves created in all parts of New Zealand have suffered badly through this unenlightened attitude. Farmers have allowed stock to break through the reserve fences, eat the undergrowth, and generally prepare it for a first-class "burn," which has duly come off. Then the devastated "scenic" asset has stood forlorn for a few years, until the farmer has demonstrated to the local Land Board that the reserve is quite useless as a scenic asset, and he is then allowed to make a complete clearance.