

## SUGGESTIONS FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF NEW ZEALAND FORESTS.

## THE EXPERIENCE OF OTHER COUNTRIES.

The value of timber from New Zealand forests which has been used in the building of prosperous provincial cities and in other directions during the past fifty years is not easily estimated. It is quite safe to say, however, that the kauri timber alone thus used represents an almost fabulous sum of money. Yet, in spite of expert evidence as to the utilisation of these magnificent resources, in the face of rapid denudation of forest areas near the centres of trade and industry, the probable total extinction of the noble kauri, and the absolute certainty that thousands of acres of forest are practically perishing—since, unlike those of Victoria, New Zealand forests do not readily renew themselves by natural growth—the extraordinary fact remains that past Governments have allowed forest conservation to retrograde, although disaster must inevitably result from such neglect in the loss of their timber-supplies.

Nature invariably avenges reckless disregard of her laws, and, if the firestick is thoughtlessly used to strip hillsides of their natural protectors, floods and landslips very soon destroy the arable country at their bases. Because, up to date, no very serious disasters of this kind have overtaken New Zealand farmers it by no means follows such will not occur. On the contrary, it may be regarded as certain that, unless the teachings of experience in European forestry lead to the adoption of such scientific means as are there employed, the occurrence of disaster is merely a question of time. Although not due to precisely the same causes, the disastrous floods at Napier, whereby property valued at £100,000 was destroyed, is an illustration of what is likely to occur through deforestation. All experience shows, indeed, that a disregard of the value of trees in the economy of daily life entails serious consequences upon the country interested; that the wholesale destruction of timber trees is a national mistake, and that reparation of damage thus caused involves the outlay of enormous sums of money.

France, for instance, stands as an object-lesson and warning to those who oppose necessary official control of the timber-cutter's work. The French people cannot be regarded as a nation of fools; yet it would seem to the uninitiated clear evidence of folly that they permitted the destruction of timber on the slopes of the Alps and Cevennes to such an extent that already they have had to expend £850,000 in replanting a hundred and fifty miles of the denuded areas, and are still engaged in the gigantic task of reforesting a further six hundred miles. These mountains were at one time covered with timber. As the grazing of sheep and cattle extended rapidly, timber was ruthlessly destroyed in favour of the grass. Retribution followed. In due course the flood-waters, pouring down the sides of these mountains, carried and distributed over the valuable farm-lands—some of the richest in France—billions of tons of silt, sand, and stones, rendering utterly valueless tens of thousands of acres of splendid country, till the scheme of reforestation above referred to became an imperative necessity.

In Switzerland also the same reckless destruction of trees resulted on several occasions in near approach to a timber famine, which was only averted by the active intervention of the Federal Government.

Of Germany, Austria, Sweden, Norway, and every country in Europe the same story of disaster by avalanche, cyclone, or floods resulting from the denudation of forests is told.

Yet, though these facts are well known, the Governments of Australasia have so far shut their eyes to the lessons they inculcate, and permit the vandalism of the splitter, hewer, &c., to have full access to forest reserves, when it is pointed out that national loss is certain to arise from such a course. Can any one suppose that the great European countries previously referred to employ each thousands of men to protect and conserve their forests on sentimental grounds, or that France undertakes the expenditure of millions in reforestation for no more practical reasons?

In view of the experiences elsewhere, the question of how best to deal with conservation of forests must be regarded as of momentous importance to the people of New Zealand, since upon the efficiency or otherwise of the work undertaken depends whether they shall gain a substantial revenue from their timber or suffer tremendous national loss.

To adopt in their entirety European systems would probably be too severe a shock to the New Zealand timber-cutter, who cannot be expected as yet to recognise the necessity for so drastic a reform.

The Indian system, admirable as it is, is open to the objection of being cumbersome, through the division of control between local and Government authorities, and also on account of the somewhat autocratic methods adopted of dealing with the forests and the numerous industries interested in them.

The democratic tendency of the peoples of Australasia makes the task of the trained forester very difficult indeed, and hence any scheme devised to meet colonial requirements must be of a character to commend itself to the good sense of the public who are chiefly interested in forest products. At the same time, it must embrace the leading principles of scientific forestry without which no scheme with this object can effect any real good. Every care, for instance, must be taken, so far as national interests permit, to minimise the risk of hampering the operations of saw-millers now engaged in the timber trade. To this end sudden and violent changes must be avoided, and existing interests carefully safeguarded. Every possible effort, indeed, should be made to conciliate and win over the sawmillers in favour of systematic organization in his own and the national interest, both of which are equally benefited by it.

During my New Zealand tour I am happy to record that I found among sawmillers a most intelligent appreciation of the necessity for forest reform, and a strong desire on the part of leading members of the trade to help the Government to place forest matters on a better footing. These men have been keen enough to see that the present wasteful system, and the frequent occurrence of disastrous fires must, unless remedial measures are speedily adopted, drive them from their holdings by cutting off supplies from the mills within a very short time.