

At the mill, also, the loss in conversion is not of so much importance to the miller paying royalty on sawn output; the main object, seemingly, is to get as much clean timber as possible without producing OB or lower grade. Millers frequently state that they get up to 80 per cent. clean timber from their mills. This percentage is only obtainable by systematical and intentional waste in the bush and mill, as can be easily seen by the inspection of worked areas of Crown lands, and by watching the operations of mills paying royalty on the sawn output.

On the occasion of the visit of your fellow-Commissioners to Ruatapu it was seen how the bush on the freehold was cleared down to trees 8 in. in diameter. Working the bush in this manner about 50 per cent. of clean timber and 50 per cent. of OB and second-class is produced. If all bush lands in Westland were worked in the same manner, more timber would be saved for use than can be grown by replanting. For settlement purposes alone it is absolutely necessary that all the millable timber should be removed by the miller. The climatic conditions are not conducive to good burns, the result being that the settler has to wait years for the timber left behind by the millers to rot before the full benefit of the land for grass-growing can be obtained.

Giving evidence before the Timber Commission in 1909 leading Greymouth sawmillers stated that unless steps were taken to prevent Oregon and other similar woods from competing with New Zealand timbers it meant that the millers would be forced to leave from 50 to 60 per cent. of the available standing timber in the bush to rot or burn. It must be presumed that these experienced gentlemen were speaking from practical knowledge, and that there has been, and is, at least this amount of waste going on since 1909.

A comparison of worked areas on Crown lands on the Coast with some of those in the North Island shows the necessity of stopping such a shameful waste of a valuable asset by at once bringing the disposal of timber under the system of sale on log measurement. If such a course were followed it is probable that at least 75 per cent. more timber would be produced per acre.

Government estimates of our remaining supplies of timber, which in this district are perfectly unreliable because no proper method of measurement or estimation has been used, give us from forty to sixty years of life, based on the present rate of increase in consumption. Taking the evidence before the Timber Commission of sawmillers, that they are leaving in the bush 50 to 60 per cent. of the standing timber, and accepting the loss in conversion at 30 per cent., the Crown is receiving royalty on only 27 or 33 per cent. of the standing measurement.

Taking the present annual output of timber from Westland at about 50,000,000 ft., the timber left behind to rot and burn, together with the unnecessary waste at the mills, would represent at least another 40,000,000 ft. to 50,000,000 ft. This represents a loss of thousands of pounds per annum, the amount of royalty received equalling about 2d. per hundred feet on the log measurement of standing timber. From the available returns on afforestation issued by the Forestry Department, as set forth in the annual returns and other published results, it is possible to plant foreign timbers to produce from 30,000 ft. to 40,000 ft. per acre in from forty to sixty years. In the Forestry report of 1909 Mr. H. A. Goudie, the Superintending Nurseryman for the North Island, estimates the value of the timber so grown, when it reaches maturity, at 12s. 6d. per hundred feet. Taking this valuation as correct, what will the sawn timber produced from these areas cost the consumer?

Accepting present costs and methods of production, the logs produce, say, 75 per cent. of timber: 12s. 6d. per hundred feet, less 25 per cent. loss equals a first cost of 16s. 8d.; milling, 6s.; average railage in Westland, 1s.; sea freights and Lyttelton charges to Christchurch, 5s.: total, £1 8s. 8d. This would put timber beyond the reach of the ordinary consumer, and under these circumstances it does not seem advisable to utilize for afforestation purposes in Westland any land that can profitably be used for agricultural or pastoral purposes.

With the area of available land for settlement yearly diminishing, is it wise to take large areas—and they must be large to be of use—when the same results—prolongation of timber-supplies—can be obtained by a more economical system in utilizing the native growth? The results of afforestation so far have proved very successful in acclimatizing and growing foreign woods. The departmental officers, however, recognize that the present annual grant is very inadequate to provide for the expansion of areas and maintenance of existing plantations.

If the evidence gathered by the Commission warrants the extension of the work of afforestation, the necessity of providing highly qualified and trained officers to carry out the work must receive attention. If the supply of timber for future generations is to be produced by afforestation, the present efforts must be largely increased. The amount of timber produced in New Zealand annually is, roughly, 420,000,000 ft., of which about 90,000,000 ft. is exported, leaving 330,000,000 ft. for home consumption. It will be seen that to provide for future requirements by afforestation it is necessary to plant at least 8,000 acres per year. This is four times the area now planted annually, so the necessity of training a large staff to attend to the extension of plantations is apparent.

In reference to the proposed export duty on white-pine, I am of the opinion that if this duty is imposed it will lead to a very great waste of the offcuts produced. The quantity of white-pine used in New Zealand, except for butter-boxes, is very small, and unless the millers can supply the Australian markets with the offcut sizes at a very low rate they will be unable to dispose of them at all. The butter-box sizes will be exported, duty or no duty, and the offcuts, representing about 33 to 40 per cent., will be practically wasted. Even at present rates the Siberian timber produced by cheap Asiatic labour is competing too successfully with our white-pine offcuts in Australia.

Summarized, my opinions on the questions before you are,—

1. For the purpose of soil-protection, water-conservation, and prevention of floods it is necessary to conserve or replant timber on river-banks, watersheds of rivers, and hillsides adjoining railways and roads.