

Forestry Bureau, to be supported by contributions from the various Governments, should immediately be constituted, and that Imperial Forestry Conferences should from time to time be held, the next one to meet in 1923, if possible in Canada. These are large and established proposals, and should find warm support in New Zealand, for it is hardly necessary to point out how greatly our own somewhat tardily initiated forestry policy will gain through being linked up with a well-thought-out system operative throughout the Empire as a whole.

## The Fire Danger

AND WELLINGTON'S NATIVE BUSH.

HEAVY PENALTIES FOR FIRE-RAISING SUGGESTED.

(By "Sylvius.")

When lands held on behalf of the commonweal are in question, personal responsibility for destruction, either by fire or other means, is practically non-existent. There are, of course, officials who are given charge of such areas, and who pay such reserves periodical visits of inspection, among other multifarious duties, but such supervision cannot be expected to involve a close day-to-day guardianship such as is given to private lands. Wellington City has done well in preserving small but valuable areas of native bush—all that remains of the wealth of magnificent forest which at one time clothed the mountains and valleys of this district. These are situated at Wadestown (within fifteen minutes of one of the city tramways), Williams Park (the Day's Bay reserve), and a fine recently-acquired area of bush at Khandallah, which has been greatly used by picnickers during the present summer. Recently a fire got a start in this last-mentioned reserve, and before it was got under some three-quarters of an acre of scrub and an edge of the real bush was destroyed. I have the authority of the Director of Reserves (Mr. J. McKenzie) for the opinion that had the wind been blowing a little stronger in the opposite direction it would have been practically impossible to have saved any portion of this splendid reserve from destruction, and the foresight of the late Onslow Borough Council and Wellington City Council in securing this reserve would have been as nought.

Another instance of how conscienceless some people are in respect to the preservation of what little native bush remains in the vicinity of Wellington was also quoted by Mr. McKenzie, who said that a person was actually observed firing the scrub in several places in close proximity to the Ngaio Gorge, and when brought to the Court for his wanton act was fined a mere £5—that for a deliberate act which might have meant the destruction of the whole of the native bush along the ridge. So keenly does Mr. McKenzie (on behalf of the city) feel that the public does not yet realise the seriousness of fire as a destroyer of irreplaceable botanic reserves that it is his intention to ask the Reserves Committee of the City Council to approach

the Minister of Justice with a view to the imposition of much heavier penalties for fire-lighting in or near any of these reserves, except in places especially provided for the use of picnic parties.

Mr. McKenzie states that in America the vast forest reserves, sometimes hundreds of square miles in area, are most jealously guarded. The Forestry Department of the United States employs a large and efficient force of men to continually guard such areas against destruction by fire. There the offence of lighting an unauthorised fire is regarded as a heinous one, and the punishment inflicted is very heavy. Lookout stations are set up on vantage points—where the guardians of the forest reside—and a special code of signals is provided by which help can be summoned should an outbreak occur. The latest method of supervising these great areas of forest is by aeroplane, showing how vastly important the State considers the matter of preserving what she has got.

The Wellington Director of Reserves believes that the same regard for our few and lamentably small forest areas should exist here, and points out how extremely precious these will become to the Empire City in the course of, say, half a century. But he cannot hold out any hope that we shall have the good luck to preserve what we have got if promiscuous fire-lighting in or even near such areas is considered an inconsequential petty offence. The public conscience, he considers, needs awakening to the dangers that come with every summer.

Take, for example, the outcry that would be raised were vernal paradise embraced in Wilton's Bush to be destroyed by the act of some skylarking boy or thoughtless adult. Thousands have visited this delightful forest resort during the summer, and have come away from its pleasant shades enraptured at the realisation that there should exist such a botanic treasure within half an hour of the centre of the city. There would immediately be a demand for stricter supervision and substantial penalties, but such could not replace the destroyed bush. Nature works slowly in New Zealand. Nowhere, since the destroying hand of the pakeha has laid waste the forest on lands of little use for man's necessities, has native bush re clothed such areas in anything like its original profusion, which is all the more reason why our little reserves should be most jealously and zealously guarded. It is to be devoutly hoped that the City Council and the Justice Department will see the point made, and back up Mr. McKenzie's laudable request for weightier and more effective means of obliterating the risk of fires within or in the vicinity of those little bits of primitive New Zealand that still glorify the land.—*Dominion.*

The Professor of Forestry at Harvard University, commenting on vague estimates made, remarked that it was often stated that figures could not lie, but he had made up his mind that liars could figure, especially when it came to estimating timber.