

He thought it would be well if they had regulations whereby any person cutting down timber was compelled to replant the land. He thought that such a scheme was practicable, and worthy of a trial. He might be permitted to state that they had adopted a scheme of leasing the forest lands in Otago, the rent being fixed at a peppercorn, and tenders invited, the person who undertook to supply timber and firewood at the lowest cost, of course, being accepted. He obtained a lease for twenty-one years under a condition that he should prevent waste and replant the land as fast as it was cleared. That plan would have proved successful, but, unfortunately, owing to the great disinclination of persons to have their privileges curtailed—even where it would ultimately be to their own advantage—and a general desire not to be hampered in any way, the regulations were not carried into effect, and people were allowed to destroy the forests as they thought fit. It would be well if the mover were to direct his attention to the preservation of the existing forests, and he thought some such provision as he had referred to might be inserted in the Bill. It might be provided that the privilege of cutting and disposing of the timber should be given to those who would supply the settlers with it at the lowest cost, and who would be bound to replant the ground as the trees were cut down, and thus preserve the forests of the country. The honorable member who introduced the measure said that it was a matter which many took an interest in, and expressed a hope that they would not, by showing that interest, strangle the Bill. Well, he would shortly bring a small Bill—a very simple measure—before the House, and when he did so he hoped the honorable member would remember what he had said about not strangling this Bill. In that Bill there would also be provision to give grants of land to those who would plant forest trees under certain conditions. These grants would be limited to 320 acres, and it was provided that a person must reside on and plant a certain proportion of the land within a given time. They had tried this experiment in Otago. They made a proposal to give land to any persons on the condition that they planted four-fifths of it in five years, and they had numerous applications; but owing to certain difficulties, and also owing to objections which were raised, to the effect that people who applied for land did so in order to get the best of it, it had not yet been carried into effect. With those objections he had no sympathy, because he considered that any one who took up land that was lying open for selection, and would plant four-fifths and cultivate the remaining fifth within five years, would have a good right to it, and would, by so using it, confer a great benefit on the country.

Mr. MERVYN thought it absolutely necessary that, if the resources of the Colony were to be developed, they must have a plentiful supply of timber. As far as the gold fields of Otago were concerned, he would say that, if they had plenty of timber, new fields would be opened that never would be unless there was a good supply. There were deep leads, 150 to 200 feet deep, that would be worked if timber could be obtained at a cheap rate in order to slab the shafts, and the deep sinking would become a remunerative branch of mining. The Bill hardly encouraged planting in new districts sufficiently, and it would be well to induce people to go on new land for the purpose of making extensive plantations, and some such encouragement ought, he thought, to be provided for in the measure before the House. He trusted the honorable member who introduced the Bill would consent to its being made as perfect as possible, and applicable to the whole Colony.

Mr. HALL, in reply, said he was exceedingly gratified at the reception the measure had met with, and was obliged to honorable members for the suggestions they had offered, as well as the spirit in which they had been made. With regard to that of the Colonial Secretary, he entirely agreed with the honorable gentleman that it would be desirable to make the measure a Colonial one. He did not himself propose a measure applicable to the whole of the Colony, because he did not feel that he possessed sufficient knowledge of other parts of the Colony to warrant him in doing so; but he would be glad to co-operate with any honorable member who might wish to have the provisions of the Bill extended, and also to consider any suggestions for encouraging the growth of forest timber in any other manner than that proposed in the present Bill. The proposals which the Bill now contained had been exceedingly well considered in the Province from which he came, and he thought it would be a very great pity not to give effect to them as soon as possible. He was rather afraid, as he had said in introducing the Bill, that honorable members might try so much, with the very best intentions, to overload it with improvements, that they would strangle it. The suggestions of the honorable member for Taieri illustrated what he meant. That honorable member proposed to introduce provisions for the conservation of forests, and although he (Mr. Hall) quite agreed that they ought to endeavour to preserve their forests, yet, if they introduced that subject into the present Bill, they might run great risk of being unable to agree upon it, and thus lose the Bill altogether. The regulations, which, according to the Bill, would have to be framed by the Executive Government, would specify the terms and conditions that would have to be fulfilled before a man would be entitled to receive any of the benefits granted under it. He would be glad if honorable members who were on the Waste Lands Committee would come to that Committee with their suggestions put into a practical shape, so that the Committee might proceed to amend the Bill without delay. The honorable member for Bruce, in support of the necessity for encouraging planting, had alluded to the fact that in one part of the Canterbury Province the winds were so violent that the sheep had to hold on by the tussocks. He understood that had been said of the part of the Province from which he (Mr. Hall) came, but unfortunately the sheep did not do so; it would be very desirable if they did hold on by the tussocks, for then they would not drive before the wind as they now did, and caused serious loss. He now moved the second reading of the Bill.

Bill read a second time.