

REPORT

OF THE

CONSERVATOR OF STATE FORESTS,

WITH

PROPOSALS FOR THE ORGANIZATION AND WORKING OF THE STATE FOREST DEPARTMENT.

Captain CAMPBELL-WALKER to the Hon. the COMMISSIONER of STATE FORESTS.

(No. 28.)

SIR,— Government Buildings, Wellington, 16th March, 1877.

I have the honor to submit my report, and proposals for the organization and working of the State Forest Department.

2. There is doubtless much in the report with which the members of Government and both Houses of Representatives are already familiar, but I have deemed it right to place on record what I have seen and done during my stay in the colony, in order that it may not be supposed that the conclusions at which I have arrived are based upon insufficient knowledge of the several districts.

3. I have endeavoured, at the same time, to avoid entering into over detail in the record of my inspections and descriptive chapter. Detailed examinations and reports on the forests, district by district, block by block, will form subject of future consideration and report, if the department be constituted.

4. In the same manner I have avoided going into detail of the duties to be performed by the officers whom it is proposed to employ, which will form part of the organization or interior economy of the department, for which the Conservator is responsible.

5. I trust that the manner in which I have occupied my time, and the report which I have now the honor to submit, may meet with the approval of His Excellency and the Government of the colony.

I have, &c.,

J. CAMPBELL-WALKER, Captain,
Conservator of State Forests.

The Hon. the Commissioner of State Forests.

INTRODUCTORY.

ON my arrival in Wellington it was decided at an interview with the Premier (Sir Julius Vogel) that, instead of proceeding at once to organize the State Forest Department, I should devote the year for which my services had been lent by the Government of India to seeing as much of the New Zealand forests as possible, and making myself acquainted with the special circumstances and conditions, not only of the climate and timbers of the colony, but of the existing regulations affecting settlement, acquisition of land, and the general bias or state of feeling of the public with regard to such matters, as well as with regard to the special question of forest conservation by the State or Government.

Acting on this principle, a route or plan of inspection was drawn up with Mr. Kirk's aid, which has, on the whole, been very closely adhered to, and which comprised, at Sir Julius Vogel's suggestion, a stay in Wellington during the worst of the winter months, when the state of the forest renders it almost impenetrable, and during which my time was devoted to reading up the debates and papers bearing on the subject, making the acquaintance of the members of both Houses then in session, and collecting all the information in my power. By these means it was hoped that by the close of the year I should be in a position to submit a report and scheme for forest administration, and the organization of a department based upon some actual experience and knowledge, and therefore more likely to be practicable and workable. This view, which was adopted by Major Atkinson on his becoming Premier, has been steadily adhered to; and I have now the honor to lay before you the results of the ten months' labour, which, insufficient as they may appear, and do seem to me, will, I trust, be deemed not altogether unsatisfactory.

2. Looking back upon the above arrangement, and contrasting my ideas of the New Zealand forests and of a system of State forest administration applicable to them with the knowledge, inadequate though it be, which I have gained by inquiry and personal inspection in, I may say, every part of both islands, and with the views which I have matured as to what is requisite and suitable for the colony and its people, I am fully satisfied of the wisdom of the course pursued, and convinced that any other must have resulted in serious mistakes, which it might have been found difficult to correct, and much unnecessary and unprofitable expenditure of public money, which, coupled with restrictions and interference unsuited to the habits and ways of thought and action of the people, could not have failed to make the department unpopular, and might have resulted in its downfall, and the postponement of the consideration of the great question of forest conservancy, and introduction of a proper system, to a far distant day when it might be too late to save, and forests might have had to be re-made.