

is proper should be cleared for the immediate supply of timber for public and private works and the progress of settlement.

I propose that we should profit by the example of other countries by introducing systematic management ere it be too late, and following in their footsteps in so far as they are adapted to the climate and conditions of New Zealand and its people. Nor can the colony ever better afford it than now. Every year the difficulties and obstacles in the way will be greater; vested rights will have sprung up; the wants of a large population for an immediate supply of timber will be paramount; and, whereas the object can now, I am confident, be attained at little or no cost, and a property of great indirect value in the present, and capable of producing a large and ever-increasing public revenue in the future, be secured to the colony, a hundred years hence it would probably cost thousands, if not millions, to attain anything approaching those results.

Ask France what she would give to undo the devastations of the past fifty years, made primarily in the supposed interests of the graziers and agricultural classes. Ask Austria what she would give to get back the public forests sold to meet the exigencies of the day. Ask Victoria and other Australasian colonies, and India, what it will cost them to remedy the devastations of the past. Ask even England, with exceptional advantages and circumstances in the shape of extensive planting by large landed proprietors, the command of the markets of the world, a small and densely populated country in which every acre cultivated with food grains is a boon, whether she would not have done better to conserve her public forests and place restrictions on the growth of common rights, which, so far as the public are concerned, mean private advantages acquired to the detriment of the interests of the public at large. The universal answer would, I feel sure, be, "Be wise in time, and secure the advantages which you now possess in your own interests and those of your posterity." I cannot sufficiently caution the Government of this country against the growth of so-called "rights and privileges" in the public estate. There are, I may say, none at present in New Zealand, but already there is evinced a tendency on the part of individuals and communities to advance and claim them on the score of uninterrupted enjoyment for a term of years. Nothing can be more natural, and nothing causes more heart-burning and dissatisfaction than to have to tell a man or body of men that what they have enjoyed free for any time is not their right and must henceforward be withdrawn, or only taken under certain conditions and on payment, even if it be but of a nominal sum. The sooner, therefore, the growth of such privileges is stopped the better and easier will it be.

3. Having thus combated, I hope successfully, some of the arguments against a State or public supervision of the forests, I proceed to state as briefly as possible what steps I propose should be taken to organize a department suitable for the purpose. First of all, I consider that a Forest Act is required providing for the selection and demarcation of the State reserved forests, and vesting their control and that of the unreserved forests, so long as they remain Crown lands, in a Conservator and body of officers specially appointed for the purpose, subject only to the authority of a Minister, to be styled the Commissioner of Forests, responsible to the House of Representatives and the public. Such an Act should provide the requisite legal machinery for the constitution of such reserved forests by the Conservator and forest officers, subject to the approval of the Commissioner, and authorize the Governor to make and promulgate regulations having the force of law for their due maintenance, conservation, and improvement. The control of such reserved forests should, in fact, be absolute, and, once duly constituted, they should be inalienable save by Act of the General Assembly. Power should also be taken to make regulations for the control and disposal of the portions of forest being waste lands of the Crown remaining unreserved, and of endowment forests the property of public corporations or institutions such as churches, schools, or hospitals, Harbour Boards, &c.; but such power should not be so wide, nor the regulations issued under it so stringent. These classes of forest would, of course, be alienable, and it would appear advisable to vest a certain amount of control and responsibility in this respect with regard to the unreserved State forests in the hands of the Waste Land Boards, subject always to the approval of the Minister for Crown Lands, who should also invariably be the Commissioner of Forests.

Full powers would be required for the assessment and collection of forest revenue, and the control and regulation of timber and other forest produce during removal from the forest, whether by land or water. The penalties for breaches of the provisions of the Act, or of regulations made under it, and the methods of enforcing them, should also be clearly prescribed. The power of allotting funds for State forest requirements and the disposal of the revenues accruing from State forests, whether reserved or unreserved, must rest with the General Assembly; but the Governor should be empowered to enter into agreements with the Conservator and all officers of the fixed or permanent establishment for periods of at least five years.

I am not sufficiently conversant with the course of legislation in New Zealand to attempt to draft such an Act; but I trust it will not be deemed presumption on my part to have thus called attention to some of the leading points which appear to demand special consideration or provision. Such an Act cannot, I would submit, be too minute in its definitions and provisions, so as to avoid even the appearance of illegality in our proceedings, especially at the outset. The regulations framed under it for each district or forest should also be very carefully considered, so that there should be no doubt but that we can legally enforce them. Neglect of such precautions has caused much trouble and detriment to the department in India, where, however, we have the rights and privileges exercised by two hundred millions of natives from time immemorial to consider and deal with.

It would by no means follow that the provisions of the Act should be at once applied throughout the colony. I should prefer that it be gradually introduced and extended as we felt our way, and could frame new regulations in accordance with the special circumstances of each district and its inhabitants. *Festina lente* is, to my mind, an excellent motto for forest officers in all parts of the world. We cannot be too careful not to introduce sweeping reforms and regulations, however excellent in themselves, without the support of or in opposition to public opinion. Granted that we had such an Act, I propose to proceed gradually with the constitution of the State reserves, whilst administering all forest lands of the Crown to the best advantage.

4. The State reserves would naturally form a very small proportion of the total area now under forest. It is difficult to lay down any hard and fast rule as to what proportion they should bear,