

NELSON.—Timber lands come in with other land, no special provision being made in that respect.

MARLBOROUGH.—Occupation licenses for ten years granted by the Waste Lands Board on such terms as it thinks fit, for the cutting of timber; no further provision. Licenses not to prevent sale of the land, nor in any way to affect the rights of the Crown thereto. Certain regulations for the issue of timber licenses appear to have been framed in 1875, but they do not seem to have been acted upon or enforced.

CANTERBURY.—Reserves may be made of land for preservation or sale of the timber growing thereon. Timber licenses may be issued within such reserves. The timber to be sold at auction, and to be removed within a certain time, else again put up to auction. Licensee making roads or erecting pits protected within a certain distance from his pit, and no one allowed to use his road without leave. Wilful injury or destruction of timber to forfeit license. Sections of timber reserves may be excluded from timber licenses, and be absolutely reserved as timber. Licenses are not now being issued, and proposals have been made for reserving all the forest lands remaining unalienated in Banks Peninsula, and at the head-waters of rivers, &c.

WESTLAND.—The same regulations as in Canterbury. Licensees now pay £5 per annum for each man (bushman or sawyer) employed, and there is a Ranger to see that the regulations are not evaded.

OTAGO.—Timbered land in areas at discretion of Board may be sold as ordinary rural land, subject, however, to assent of the Governor. Seven years' licenses for cutting timber granted by the Board upon such terms as it thinks fit. Not to preclude the Board from selling the land, or including it within a Hundred. The form of license being at the discretion of the Board, it may issue the license subject to such regulations as they please. Any lessee or occupier of waste lands in Otago may cut down what timber he wants for fencing or for firewood from any Crown lands, so long as the timber itself has not been specially reserved. There are three Rangers, whose duties are however mainly in connection with the Crown Lands Department, and who have little time to look after the forest.

SOUTHLAND.—Subsequent to the reunion of Southland with Otago the law in Southland as to timber land has been re-enacted, and is now *ipsissimis verbis* the same as in Otago; but the regulations framed on it are different, all the forest area remaining undisposed of being reserved, and portions leased to saw-millers on payment of a tithe. Settlers must also take out licenses or payment for all timber and firewood required from the Government forests. There is an Inspector of Forests, whose duty it is to enforce the regulations.

The former exhibits, in reply to query 1, in a very general manner the area of forest lands in the several provincial districts remaining undisposed of, amounting roughly to twelve millions of acres (11,640,696), including 800,000 acres in Taranaki classed as confiscated, but not, I presume, actually available to be dealt with as we choose.

At page 35 of the Papers relating to State Forests, printed in 1874, is an estimate of forest land by Dr. Hector, which gives the total area at 12,130,000 acres; but if the estimates furnished by the Commissioners of Crown Lands be anything like accurate, and we add to them the area of forest in Native and private hands generally, the total will be greatly in excess of Dr. Hector's estimate. The rate of consumption and destruction must, however, be enormous, as may be judged from reference to the imperfect statement of out-turn of the several saw-mills at work accompanying this report, and the knowledge that this does not represent one-tithe of the total consumption in the shape of posts and rails, firewood, &c., and takes no account of the timber wasted and destroyed by fire and other causes. It appears unnecessary to recapitulate here the gist of the replies to the other queries received from the several districts. They are, as a rule, so vague, and contain so little of the information which I wished to obtain, that I conclude it is not available, and that its collection and submission must be left till we have a body of special officers, one of whose first duties it would be to obtain accurate information on the several points regarding which we are now in the dark. To one point, however, attention may be called—viz., that whereas to my knowledge most of the forests are being indented on to no small degree, the State is receiving little or nothing from them. In several cases the returns say they are not worked at all, but in others—*e.g.*, Auckland, "worked on a small scale;" Taranaki, "two saw-mills at work;" Marlborough, "fourteen saw-mills in operation: estimated out-turn per annum, 17,950,000 feet"—the revenue derived is given as *nil*. The provisions of the several Waste Lands Acts bearing on the subject are most instructive, showing the diversity of opinion with which it has been approached and handled, and when compared with the results, as given in the reports of the Crown Lands Commissioners, how generally they would appear either not to have been in force, or to what an extent they have been evaded.

The fact is that, except in Southland and to a certain extent in Otago and Westland, there has, I believe, been no machinery to secure compliance with the regulations, which therefore were never enforced; still more so when forest land was being sold outright for not more, and in some cases much less, than the rent or royalty asked for the user of the timber thereon.

We must therefore, I think, consider those sections and the regulations framed on them as a dead-letter except in the districts mentioned above, especially Southland, where by reserving all the forest lands from sale and leasing out blocks to saw-mills as required, the Waste Lands Board made a commencement in the right direction, and have laid the foundation of a real system of conservancy and working.

Having dismissed all idea of control over the forests exercised by the Government or Waste Lands Boards, there remains but little doubt that the saw-millers, hand-sawyers, and splitters have made the most they could out of them for their own advantage, and doubtless also that of the purchasers. They have very naturally cut out the best of the timber and left the rest standing, paid little or no attention to the exclusion of fire from their own or neighbouring blocks of forest—in short, conducted their operations on the simplest and most remunerative plan for themselves, but most wasteful and detrimental to the public estate. I do not in any way wonder at nor blame them; on the contrary I think they deserve the highest praise for their energy and enterprise, and the manner in which they have supplied and are supplying the market. The industry is a very important one, giving employment to a large number of hands, the wages distributed in Southland alone averaging, according to Mr. McArthur, the Inspector of Forests, £60,000 per annum. During the debates on the