

## THE FORESTS OF THE COLONY

Mr POTTS moved, That it is desirable Government should take steps to ascertain the present condition of the forests of the Colony, with a view to their better conservation. He had put that motion on the Order Paper in order that some attention might be drawn to the state of forests of New Zealand at the present time. Although it might more vitally affect the Middle Island, at the same time he thought the forests of the entire Colony should have some attention bestowed upon them. He had waited with patience to see if some steps would be taken to preserve the forests which were the admiration of every visitor to New Zealand; and he considered that it was quite time that some action should be taken in the matter. By taking that course he did not intend to wound any provincial susceptibilities, in imputing any blame to those gentlemen who had the administration of Crown Lands, although his impression was that it would have been well if more attention had been given to the state of the forests and waste lands. He considered the rapidity with which the woods were destroyed would make them disappear in a short time, and work a great change in the prospects of the settlers. The mischievous results from the cutting down of forests in a wholesale manner had called for the attention of the Legislature of Victoria; and in America, where the settlers had been exceedingly wasteful of the wood, it had been suggested to the Government that they should make some reserves in perpetuity. Marsh, an American writer on physical geography as modified by human action, citing the effects of deforesting on the French slopes of the Alps, and other localities, carefully points out the varied influence of the forests, as shelter, on temperature, on humidity, on floods, on the flow of springs; and his arrangement of facts proves the removal of forests to be the primary cause of excessive inundations. He (Mr Potts) believed they could see an example of this in the stream which flows through the valley of the Hutt. Since the settlers of that part of the Province commenced clearing, an entire change had taken place in the river. He believed a very short time would effect a similar change in the rivers of Westland. Hochstetter, speaking of the local character of that noblest of New Zealand trees, the kauri pine, says:—"Extensive districts, which had formerly been covered with kauri wood, are now totally destitute of such, and the extermination of that noble tree progresses from year to year at such a rate, that its final extinction is as certain as that of the Natives of New Zealand." Writing of the soil requisite for the growth of kauri, he says:—"Individuals should not be suffered to ravage those precious woods, and to turn the country into a desert to the detriment of whole generations to come. For the sake of a few serviceable trunks, sometimes whole forests are burnt down and desolated, and what formerly had been employed in the war of cannibal tribes in a stratagem to burn out the enemy is done now for the sake of money. The woods are ransacked and ravaged with fire and sword. During my stay in Auckland, I was able to observe from my windows, during an entire fortnight, dense clouds of smoke whirling up, which arose from an enormous destructive conflagration of the woods nearest to the town. When the fire had subsided, a large beautiful tract of forest lay there in ashes." What will the world-wide readers of Hochstetter think of our barbarous improvidence? The same warning had been pointed out twenty-five years ago. An official of the New Zealand Company had also pointed out the destructive propensities of the settlers in cutting down valuable wood. He says:—"A melancholy scene of waste and destruction presented itself to me when I went up to see this forest. Several square miles of it

were burning, having been fired in order to make room for the conveyance of logs down to the creek. Noble trees, which had required ages for their perfection, were thus ruthlessly destroyed in great numbers.” The immense variety of trees comprising most of the New Zealand trees (excepting the *Dammara* and *Fagus* forests, which species are mostly gregarious) should not be lost sight of, the timber being suitable for a vast variety of purposes, spars, planks, ships’ knees and timbers, ground-sills, piles, sleepers, wedges, blocks, and furniture of exquisite beauty in grain and markings. At the exhibition of 1862 he saw some splendid articles of furniture made of kauri wood sent from Auckland for exhibition, and they were very highly valued indeed. A manufacturer of furniture of high class had stated that there was great difficulty in getting the kauri wood as well as the high price that had to be paid for it. Besides the timber itself the forests would furnish bark for dyeing and tanning purposes, the lichens covering the trees might in all probability possess dyeing qualities, resinous gums exuded from the *Dammara* and *Panax*, and perhaps many other varieties, vegetable oil had been expressed from the titoki (*Alictryon excelsum*). He believed many other useful products were only awaiting scientific investigation to add to the wealth and resources of the country; but unless some restraint was placed on the destructive elements now so actively employed, he feared the value of our woodland wealth would only be appreciated on the eve of its extinction. There was no doubt that wood was much wasted here, for he had a note from a writer formerly living in Auckland, who stated that he knew of wood used as firewood there, which fetched 1s. a foot for veneer at home. Eight veneers to an inch would give £4 16s. the cube foot. With regard to the condition of the Middle Island he might mention that he had often seen Banks’ Peninsula covered, for weeks together, with thick and lurid smoke; and in Pigeon Bay, a fire of a most destructive character occurring, an action was brought by the proprietor, under a Canterbury Ordinance, to recover damages, and which were recovered to the extent of £3,000; but, although notice might be taken in this manner in the case of private land, he did not think that notice was ever taken of any damage in the case of Crown Land. No inquiry was made with reference to the destruction of large forests, and he thought something practical should be done in the matter, as also, perhaps, an inquiry as to the wisdom of the indiscriminate issue of timber-cutting licenses, the men being in the habit of skinning a bush, as they call it, a practice which, by the dry cuttings of underwood being left amongst the green trees, caused, when fire was accidentally set to it, most destructive results. Again, there was no distinction made by classifying bush land, and the finest timber land sold for the same price as the driest shingle bed that would hardly feed a goat. Besides the destruction of wood by fire, other valuable products were destroyed which might be obtained from the bush, such as vegetable dyes and resinous gums, and the effect of such wholesale destruction would be, he believed, that they would actually exhaust their bush by the time they discovered its full value.