

Meeting at Canberra.

CANBERRA, Wednesday.

The Empire Forestry Conference was opened by the Governor-General in the Albert Hall, Canberra, this morning. The attendance included many members of the Federal Ministry and public service.

Prime Minister's Welcome.

In welcoming the delegates the Prime Minister (Mr. Bruce) said he was glad to see that so many distinguished foresters had come so far to discuss, on an Empire basis, the great problem, and to give Australia some assistance in facing it. He had to confess it had been greatly neglected in the past. He was afraid the impression they must have gained was that Australia was a very young country faced with great problems, and he must plead, in extenuation that, throughout their history, they had been so obsessed with the necessity of making available land for agricultural and other forms of production that they had done everything in their power to get rid of the trees. That had been the story for 100 years; but, during the last 15 years, they had realized the potentialities and possibilities of forestry, and he hoped they had seen some signs that Australia was endeavouring to utilise her timber resources. By taking a wise course now they should be able to meet their own requirements. Australia had great resources in hardwoods, and needed advice on how to stimulate production of soft woods and how to assist, by the expansion of the hardwoods, to meet the necessary supply for other parts of the Empire. The conference would be a great contribution to the general welfare of the Empire. The presence of the delegates in Canberra was a real help, because of the great Imperial movement of international collaboration upon which the success of the Empire rested. They would contribute to Australian forestry knowledge, point out what was desirable in many directions, and indicate the extent to which collaboration between the Commonwealth and the States would produce the best results.

Lord Clinton, chairman of the conference, said it was impossible that there could ever have gathered together a body more representative of the Empire than the present one. Reference had been made to the British outlook on forestry. Australia had only been destroying forests for a hundred years; they could beat that in Britain. There they had been destroying trees for four centuries. In Australia forestry had to give way to agriculture, but there was a close connection between the two, and they could be mutually helpful. They realized the heavy task before Australian foresters, so that wealth would be available to present and future generations and provide all the requirements of the increasing population and the development of industry which must follow.

Forestry Education.

The debate of forestry education was then continued. Major R. D. Furse (Britain) said that one institution should be sufficient, but that should be thoroughly equipped and staffed. Too many institutions meant weakened training. They should aim at real education.

Mr. N. W. Jolly (N.S.W.) stated that in Australia, the low timber prices and low revenue made it impossible to provide a sufficiently highly trained staff from the funds available. For Australia's 10 million acres of forests 500 officers would be required. A Federal school was the only solution and it was to be hoped it would be the only one.

Mr. F. Tate, of the Victorian Education Department, outlined a scheme undertaken in Victorian schools by which each school acquires 50 acres of land, on which to plant trees, over a period of 25 years, at the rate of two acres a year. Many farmers in Australia, he was afraid, still regarded trees as enemies.

ADELAIDE: FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 1928.

THE CANBERRA CONFERENCE ON FORESTRY.

We have been so accustomed to reproaching ourselves and hearing ourselves reproached for our careless treatment of our timber resources that it is consoling to reflect that, as we were reminded by Lord Clinton at the opening of the Empire Forestry Conference at Canberra this week, other countries, and particularly the motherland, have offended much more conspicuously in this respect. We may have done almost as much mischief to our silvicultural resources as we could, but then we have only had a hundred years to do it in, whereas the

depletion of the forest reserves of Great Britain has been proceeding for four centuries at least, and it has been left to the last decade to place afforestation on a really sound basis. We have had the excuse that much of our destructiveness has not been wholly wanton, for there was, at all events, as the Prime Minister says, a belief that it was necessitated by the requirements of agriculture, and in any case it took place at a time when the scarcity of timber had not become, as for some years it has been, a world problem of the greatest magnitude.

The aim of the Empire Forestry Conference is to render the Empire, in the matter of timber, self-sufficing, which, as shown in the latest report on the subject of the Imperial Economic Committee, it is far as yet from being. Last year the United Kingdom imported £67,000,000 worth of timber, manufactured wood, and wood pulp, which was more than was paid for any other sort of raw material, wool and cotton excepted, and of this sum £50,000,000 represented timber, nine-tenths of which was drawn from foreign sources. The Great War naturally played havoc with the timber resources of Great Britain, its exigencies involving the sacrifice of a third of its standing timber, which accounts to some extent for its present inability to supply its own requirements. This would matter comparatively little were the overseas Dominions in a position to repair the deficiency, but no less than 95 per cent. of imported softwoods and 70 per cent. of hardwoods come from extra-Imperial sources. Even this situation might be tolerated were the supply of timber, especially softwoods, inexhaustible; but all countries are lamenting their lack of provision and failure to realise that, while a tree may be cut down within a few minutes, it takes years to grow. At present in the matter of home-grown softwoods the Empire is saved from a positive famine by the still plethoric resources of Canada which the opening of the Panama Canal has rendered available for export at a cost not positively prohibitive. At present the Douglas fir finds its principal market in the United States, but this is largely because the people of Britain have not been fully educated as to its value for useful and decorative purposes. Fortunately parts of the Empire, and particularly Australia, are rich in hardwoods, and our attention is invited by the Economic Committee to some interesting experiments in India designed to render the lighter kind of hardwoods available by proper seasoning as substitutes for softwoods. If, as is claimed, these lighter hardwoods can be so treated as to be indistinguishable in color and working properties from softwoods, a market will be furnished for an immense mass of arboricultural wealth that now goes to waste. Oak is mentioned as a commodity of which the Empire should provide more than one per cent. of the £2,000,000 worth imported yearly by Great Britain. There is no industry that makes a heavier demand on brains than forestry, and the brains are required at every stage, from the planting of the trees to the disposal of the timber derived from them. The labor required for planting and supervision is relatively slight, but, as Major R. D. Furse stated at the Canberra Conference, the labor must be efficient and well-trained. On this subject Mr. N. W. Jolly stated that for Australia to make the best of its ten million acres of forest land the services of 500 trained officers would be required, and with timber at its present low price the problem is to obtain funds enough to defray the cost of training.

But even when the training problem is solved, there is the question of marketing; and we are bidden by the Economic Committee to observe how foreign countries go about this work. Everything is organized, from propaganda to the regulation of supplies. The study of market demands in respect of quality and quantity is made a science; and what is needed is the same care in the marketing of Empire timber, so that shipments should have a steady relation to demand, and that the supplies of one State should not spoil the market for those of another. The Forest Department of India has set an example to other Dominions by keeping an officer in Great Britain with a special knowledge of Indian woods. He is in constant touch with large users and important building organizations; and the committee suggests that other parts of the Empire would find it profitable to be also represented. Expert training and skilled marketing are both vital matters; and so is research; and the Economic Committee is busying itself with efforts to secure a widening of the activities of the Forest Products Research Laboratory at Princes Risborough, in Buckinghamshire, established three years ago by the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, so that they shall include Empire investigations on a more systematic scale than at present. It is unreasonable to expect private enterprise at its own risk and expense to break new ground with Empire timbers at present unknown to the British market; and the assistance of the Dominions interested is asked in the initial stages of the effort to find a market for their products. One object of the visit of the Empire delegates is to concert measures for the collaboration of all parts of the Empire in a common scheme for making the best of its arboricultural resources, which can only be done through a vigorous propaganda designed to awaken popular opinion to the importance of a forestry system established and conducted with the same regularity and precision as attends the result of any other primary industry.

Problems of the Murray.

Harm Done by Grazing.

CANBERRA, Friday.

The subject for the consideration of delegates to the Empire Forestry Conference to-day was "Climate and Erosion," but the discussion developed into an important contribution with reference to the erosion problems of the River Murray and the possible effect upon the huge works which are being carried out there.

The main paper on the subject was contributed by Professor G. L. Wood, of Melbourne University. After reviewing the work on the River Murray, he contended that forests should be retained on the catchment areas because, however inconclusive was the evidence of the effect of forests in increasing the rainfall, the fact that, after it had fallen, they conserved it and regulated its flow was beyond dispute. There was definite evidence of this on the Murray, and the deforestation of the watershed had seriously disturbed the natural balance between the winter and summer flows. Summer flow had decreased from 50 per cent. to 26 per cent. of the annual flow, and that in winter had increased as a corollary, and the surface velocity had increased in winter over the whole area. The first and foremost measure of prevention was to declare national reserves around the headquarters of all streams. Grazing licences, which were the root cause of deforestation in the hill sections, should be abolished immediately. Much of the damage already perpetrated would be remedied by natural regeneration and expensive measures for afforestation in future would be rendered unnecessary.

Every delegate who spoke, told a tale of devastation in various parts of the world, caused by rivers, whose catchments had been denuded of the restraining influence of trees, with the result that floods and siltation had destroyed large areas of agricultural land, wiped away whole towns, and depopulated country sides.

Mr. N. W. Jolly (N.S.W.) stated that rabbits, particularly on the Murray watershed, were the most important factor in erosion, as they were the worst overgrazers in Australia. The mountains along the Murray were the most important breeding ground in Australia, but the New South Wales Government was taking steps to deal with Crown lands there.

Mr. R. T. Ball (Minister for Land, New South Wales), stated that his Government would do all in its power, in conjunction with the Commonwealth and States, on Crown and lease lands.

Mr. F. Chaffey (Minister for Forests, New South Wales), suggested a joint committee to take definite and decisive action without delay.

Mr. Beckett (Minister for Forests, Victoria) stated that four-fifths of the Murray siltation came from Victoria; but, in that State, up to two months ago, it had not been looked upon as a forestry question. Every effort should be made to keep the graziers off. They were the curse of foresters, and the small amount they paid in grazing fees was not at all commensurate with the damage they did.

Lord Clinton (chairman) suggested that the Commonwealth and State delegates should meet at once to formulate a plan of action.

When the debate was concluded, and the question had been referred to the resolutions committee, a meeting such as Lord Clinton had suggested, was held.

FORESTRY.

THE EMPIRE CONFERENCE.

Canberra, September 27.

The Empire Forestry Conference continued the debate on "The living tree and the forest" at to-day's session.

Mr. A. C. Forbes (Irish Free State), speaking on various forms of forestry research, said every man employed in the work was noticing something every day, and should report everything he saw. There should be a central administration, at which such information could be studied with a view to dissemination.

Professor Osborn (Sydney University) referred to the value of a proper statistical examination of results, but said the work was made difficult by reason of the slow growth of subjects of study. Research he summed up as an attitude of mind associated with divine discontent. During his fifteen years in Adelaide he passed through his hands most of the students graduated in forestry in Australia, and he had always impressed upon them to bring that discontent to bear on text book facts and to test them as opportunity offered. One could not help being impressed by the ignorance with which the problem of the living plant was faced in Australia, and that obtained in Britain also except for recent research work. There was room for co-operation in research between the botanical departments, the departments of soil science—the Waite Institute in Adelaide was the only one in Australia—and practical departments.

Mr. C. E. Carter (Forestry School, Canberra), stated that delegates did not seem to recognise the difficulty in Australia of securing suitable men to undergo training for forestry work. There was also the difficulty of finding an adequate sum of money to train staffs and to pay them a salary in keeping at the end of the training term. The salaries must be commensurate with the work and time taken in training, but forestry officers to-day were not much better off than ordinary public servants. The choice of men was limited, and there were no free lance students to compete for positions offering.

Mr. W. Gay (Victoria) welcomed the idea of a central office to direct forestry research in Australia with the co-operation of the States.

Mr. E. H. F. Swain (Queensland) indicated various avenues of research which could be followed. He said forestry was essentially research from beginning to end, but there was a danger of research being lost under the burden of routine. The Canberra Forestry School was the proper place as the centre of research and correlation.

Mr. N. W. Jolly said the brightest spot in the conference was the acceptance by the delegates of central control. Victoria and Queensland had signified their acceptance of the principle, and that meant, he hoped, that the States would not have to pay. (Laughter.) It certainly meant that. They could now see the Commonwealth Forestry Bureau established. That would be a big thing for Australian forestry. The next thing, and he did not think that would be difficult, was to work in thorough unison.

The conference next debated methods of the protection of timber, and Dr. Swain (Canada) warned those concerned to watch carefully an insect which had made its appearance among Pinus insularis in South Australia. There were no bark beetles in Australia but if they did get into Pinus insularis their control would mean great effort and loss of plantations. They could be introduced in green timber on any block of wood with bark adhering.

A FORESTRY HANDBOOK.

As a guide for the visit of the delegates to the Empire Forestry Conference of South Australia, a Forestry Handbook has been prepared by the Conservator of Forests (Mr. E. Julius) and the Forester and Plans Officer (Mr. A. L. Pinches), under the authority of the Commissioner of Forest Lands (Hon. J. Cowan). The handbook contains a lot of valuable information regarding the progress of afforestation in the State. Forestry in South Australia, it is stated in the book, may be said to have commenced in 1870, when, in the House of Assembly, Mr. Krichauff moved for a return on September 7 as to what was the best size of reserves for forest purposes, and where they were to be made. He asked for a recommendation on the best and most economical means of preserving the native timber and of planting or replanting the reserves as permanent State forests. Information was also asked regarding the most valuable indigenous or foreign trees, having in view, as well as a supply for public purposes, an annual revenue from the sale of surplus timber. The book shows that there were 202,227 acres of forest reserves in the State on June 30, 1927, and that there was an area enclosed for planting on December, 1927, of 42,618 acres. Over 50 years ago the rapid depletion of the natural forests of the State was recognised as a serious matter. The Surveyor-General (Mr. G. W. Goyder) in a report to the Assembly in 1873, said:—"I am of opinion that the cultivation of forest trees throughout the entire province is urgently required, as, in whatever direction my duties take me, the rapid decrease in forest trees is brought painfully and prominently before me. In the South-East the whole of the indigenous timber is rapidly dying, and to such an alarming extent as to induce the belief that unless remedial measures are adopted a greater portion of same will be treeless as far as useful timber is concerned; and the same remarks will apply to the greater portion of the north." He proposed the establishment of a series of nurseries and that 7,000,000 trees be planted during the first planting season, and that covering a period of 12 years a sum of £130,000 be spent on afforestation. A Forest Board was established in 1875, and in 1878 Mr. John Ednie Brown took up the duties of Conservator of Forests.