

Te Kura Ngahere

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IN MEMORIAM.

Rt. Hon. Sir Francis H. D. Bell, P.C., G.C.M.G., K.C.

Sir Francis Bell was the doyen of the Institute's Honorary Members and his passing gives cause for the deepest regret, although he had reached the ripe age of 85 years and for long had been known only by repute to present day foresters. His claims to grateful remembrance are many and varied. As is natural, they are to be found mainly in the fields of his own professions of law and politics, but the Chief Justice of the Dominion in his obituary oration to the Bench and the Bar drew attention to the little known fact that, of all his public achievements, Sir Francis himself took greatest pride in his work as Commissioner of State Forests (1918-1920).

Born in Nelson in 1851, he had throughout his life watched New Zealand's forests disappear apace with the merest semblance of management. His legal practice had shown him clearly by the beginning of the century that the State Forests Acts of 1885 afforded but little protection save to almost negligible areas.

The Empire-wide wave of forestry activity at the end of the Great War found him Attorney-General, a Member of the Legislative Council, and a trusted and influential member of the Massey Ministry. He seized the opportunity, and became the political sponsor of modern forest management for New Zealand's forests. First he achieved administrative independence, securing severance of the Forestry Department from the Department of Lands (1919), and then as Minister in Charge of the new Department, he set about the securing of new and adequate forest legislation. The result was the Forests Act of 1921, which established the State Forest Service. When the new Service was firmly established and protected by reasonably adequate legislation, his task was finished and he severed his connection with forestry. Forestry's debt to him, despite this very short connection with it, is a very real one. It is conceivable, even probable, that without his influence and his decisive action, New Zealand forestry would have even yet no statutory independence; and it is certain that without that, retrenchment and even abolition would have been forestry's lot long since.

Sir Francis was proud of his achievements in the field of forestry, but New Zealand foresters have far more reason to be proud of their association with so versatile and eminent a man. His posts were many and arduous, his honours were many and merited. Of him as of Cato of old, it may of a truth be said, "*Nulla ars neque privatae neque publicae rei gerendae ei defuit; urbanas rusticasque res pariter callebat.*"