

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Special-purpose Species

Sir,—Any response is always an honour to the unpractised, and I well remember my secret satisfaction when, on my first attempt at public debate on forestry matters, a front-row member of the audience had a fit at my feet and had to be carried out. But Mr Barton does me too much honour, and unwittingly lays at my door sins of which I am quite innocent. Not for me to slander the virtues of kauri, rather I listened to, and dutifully wrote down the opinions of a learned scientist from the Forest Research Institute, and abode by the dictum of the chairman that we should not seriously regard indigenous species as their cut was declining and impossible to raise in the working future. We were to look to faster growing substitutes that would in the meantime give us some of the qualities of those timbers of yore, so profligately used.

We therefore spent little time on kauri, rimu, tawa and the others and even passed lightly over timbers of an acknowledged international reputation such as Southland silver birch, though left to ponder on why timber merchants should prefer to seek their supplies in places like Bankok and Singapore rather than Tuatapere.

As I recall, kauri was described by one eminent forester present as "the radiata of its day, coming in large piece sizes, with abundant clear wood, of indifferent appearance and moderate strength, doing many things adequately but few excellently, and with a reputation lusted by nostalgia and scarcity". On that may be built an excellent local stumpage but not a wider reputation.

Indeed, I doubt in these days of declining values whether the Institute should support species from the soft and winterless north, prey to every disease and lacking in the moral fibre borne of a good south-west gale. Mr Barton should take heed of ecologists: beech is on the move again, coming down from the hills whence Holloway consigned it, and the days of kauri may be numbered.

As for coming north myself, I have spent the better part of my career sinking geographically until I can go no further, so why must I run the risk of falling in other ways? I will stay protected by long underwear in the sure knowledge that

what men call gallantry and the gods adultery,
is much more common where the climate's sultry.

Incidentally we do have a stand of kauri near Dunedin, described by an eminent local forester who had spent time at Kaikohe as growing as fast as the best in Northland. They bear cones, too, but being young and properly brought up these are as yet sterile. However, in due course we will have our own seed source and we will be sending missionaries north.

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[*This correspondence is now closed.* Ed.]