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THE SANDALWOOD INDUSTRY.

In the Legislative Assembly last week a motion by Mr. Mullany, M.L.A. for Menzies, for the disallowance of Regulation 5 under the regulations of the Forests Act was carried without a division, after a debate which threw some light on the present conditions of the sandalwood industry. The regulation in question proposed prohibition on the removal of sandalwood under 14 inches circumference. Mr. Scaddan, the Minister for Forests, defended it on the ground that the State could not afford to have sandalwood cut while it was in the smaller size, but must conserve it until it reached maturity. The Minister further declared that nobody, inside or outside the House, had any personal knowledge of the time it took sandalwood on the goldfields to grow to a certain diameter, because there was nobody who had lived long enough on the goldfields. Incidentally, he defended Mr. Lane-Poole, the Conservator of Forests, who was responsible for the regulation, as "a trained, scientific forester, who was making magnificent progress in a new path." This is doubtless true, but Mr. Lane-Poole, as is not un-

common with experts of unquestioned attainments, is not infrequently a trifle dogmatic and addicted to trying to impose his will on Ministers. As an authority on scientific forestry, and practical forestry generally, he may be in a class of his own, but there must be many people in the State with no pretensions to scientific attainments who have a much larger first-hand acquaintance with the growing capacities of sandalwood than the Conservator. Mr. Underwood asserted during the debate that there are parts of Western Australia where sandalwood did not grow beyond the size of two fingers, and where the cutting of it as small as it would pay to cut would do no harm to the industry. The opinion of the House was that the size fixed in the regulation was too large and that the attempt to enforce it would be unfair to the puller. Mr. Scaddan said that if the House disapproved of the regulation he would promise not to impose it, and, the House having duly done so, the regulation is presumably relegated to the category of rules that have been made too hurriedly and are not to be enforced. Possibly no damage has been done, but there seems no reason why this aspect

of the case should not have been taken into account before the regulation was ever gazetted. The more reliable information we have on some of these vexed questions the better for everybody, and it is foolish to try and legislate for the alleged protection of the sandalwood industry on defective data and conclusions that may be proved er-

clusions that may be proved erroneous. The sandalwood question is one that concerns the goldfields mainly nowadays. In the early days of West Australia the tree was found in the vicinity of Perth, and it extended over the Darling Ranges into the farming areas. It proved of the greatest assistance to the pioneers of the Swan River Settlement in tiding them over their difficulties, and shipments from Fremantle were made with fair regularity in the first half-century of the colony's existence. In the early days of sandalwooding, we are told, stems were often found of over a foot in diameter and twelve feet in length. Some of them weighed up to six cwt., and there are even said to have been records of trees being felled which yielded more than half a ton of marketable timber. But things are different nowadays. In a recently issued departmental publication entitled "Notes on the Forests and Forest Products and Industries of Western Australia," it is definitely stated that "the supply of sandalwood close to the seaboard has long since been exhausted and the source is now away back in the goldfields districts." The tree, it is added, has ceased to exist on the Wheat Belt. The mulga belts of the goldfields and a large portion of the Gascoyne district are indicated as the most profitable sandalwood country of today. The tree will thrive in a rainfall as low as eight inches per annum. It exists, it is further noted, as a small tree attaining a height of from twelve to sixteen feet, with a diameter of from six to eight inches. The building of the Great Western Railway brought to light the fact that very considerable belts of sandalwood exist north and south of

sandalwood exist north and south of the line, at points from 80 to 120 miles east of Kalgoorlie, but the extent of the belts has not yet been ascertained. Coming to the botanical characteristics of West Australian sandalwood and its commercial uses, the following extracts are worth quoting. "Sandalwood is not a social species, but is of a parasitic habit, and is found interspersed among other forest trees. The wood is a light yellow in colour and is aromatic. Very little of the wood is used within Western Australia for cabinet or decorative purposes. The bulk of that exported to the East is used for religious and ceremonial purposes, and for the manufacture of glove, jewel, and suchlike boxes. The wood yields an oil, and a factory distilling the oil product is in operation in Western Australia. The W.A. oil differs from the Indian oil inasmuch as it has a positive refraction. It is extensively used in medical practice in Australia and has given every satisfaction. The Council of Science and Industry is making therapeutic tests with a view to determining the relative values medicinally of the Indian and Western Australian oils. Up to the end of June, 1919, 32,360 tons of sandalwood of a value of £2,827,035 had been exported from Western Australia. In the recent debate in Parliament, Mr. Scaddan mentioned that the normal yearly consumption of our sandalwood in China was from four to six thousand tons, but that for the year ended June 30 last, 14,000 tons had been exported and 17,000 tons had been pulled here. It is obvious that the industry was never more of a stand-by for the back-country than it has become of late, and while nobody will quarrel with regulations directed to preventing ruthless destruction of sandal-

with regulations directed to preventing ruthless destruction of sandalwood, the crippling and limiting of legitimate operations should be avoided at all cost.