

(*Myrsine salicina*), rewarewa, maire-raunui (*Olea* [Cunninghamii]), and some other common trees are occasionally converted, but form no appreciable portion of the total output.

MOUNT EGMONT FOREST RESERVE.

At present this is the only State forest in the district, and was originally set apart for climatic purposes. It forms a circle twelve miles in diameter around the grand cone of Mount Egmont, and contains 72,382 acres, of which the Chief Surveyor computes 50,000 acres to consist of forest and scrub not exceeding 20ft. in height, 15,000 acres low scrub, and 8,000 acres open, forming the portion of the cone above 4,500ft. or thereabouts. The lower margin of the forest descends to between 1,300ft. and 1,400ft., or even lower, on the southern face; on the northern, or, rather, the north-western, side it crosses the Pouakai Range, and at this place scarcely descends below 4,000ft. The upper margin of the scrub is fully 4,500ft.

The amount of convertible timber comprised in this large area is very small; here and there a few well-grown medium-sized red-pines may be found near the lower margin, with an occasional kahikatea or matai, and some good tawa; the rata is frequent, and sometimes attains an enormous size; a grand specimen on the lower part of the ascent has a trunk over 20ft. in diameter, and is one of the finest in the district. The vast mass of the forest consists of mahoe, fuchsia, horopito, broad-leaf, akeake, and scrubby growth, of no present value for conversion. Much of this undergrowth is, however, of a very open character, consisting of large spreading mahoe and towai, branching from the base, but of sufficient height to allow a man to walk underneath with ease; so that considerable areas might be easily cleared and the process of replacement carried on at a comparatively small cost. Larch, black Austrian pine, Douglas fir, English oak, and various eucalypts would flourish at different altitudes; so that the formation of a forest of immense value may be fairly anticipated, while increased protection would be given to the numerous streams which commence their course within its limits.

THE TIMBER INDUSTRY IN TARANAKI.

Notwithstanding the small proportion of convertible timber comprised in the Taranaki forests the timber trade is of considerable importance, finding employment for seven saw-mills and 106 men. The annual output is estimated at 5,750,000 superficial feet, which I think is rather under the mark. With the exception of a mill supplying local demands at Manaia, all the mills are on the line of the New Plymouth and Wanganui rails or closely adjacent. The foreign export is but trivial; for the year 1884 it was returned at 114,262 superficial feet, valued at £704.

All the mills are working on freehold land, the greater portion of the logs being obtained from the holders of deferred-payment sections. The convertible timber being usually scattered renders the working of the bush more expensive than in other districts. Timber-wheels are often employed to bring the timber to the loading-places on the tramways, and in one instance I found that logs were hauled in this way for nearly three-quarters of a mile, the wheels being drawn by six pairs of oxen.

Nearly all the mills are worked entirely by day-labour. In some cases contracts are made for the delivery of logs to the tramways, and in many cases the logs must cost fully 3s. per 100 superficial feet before they arrive at the mill. Most of the mills are worked in an efficient and economical manner: vertical breaking-down saws are more frequent than in the mills of the South Island.

I have already spoken of the excellent quality of the Taranaki rimu, and in confirmation thereof may state that at one of the best mills I was shown a large quantity of well-manufactured boards 20in. to 24in. wide, prepared to the order of an Auckland firm, solely for cabinetwork.

Some time back the saw-millers found their profits were destroyed by the keen competition resulting from over-production: in order to meet the evil they agreed upon a common scale of prices, and, in order to maintain it, resolved to close their mills for one or two days in the week when necessary. The agreement appears to have been faithfully kept and to have worked in a satisfactory manner. The ruling price for first quality rimu is about 10s. per 100 superficial feet delivered at New Plymouth or Waitara; for white-pine, 6s. per 100: at stations along the line it is from 1s. to 2s. per 100ft. less. Wages are from 6s. to 7s. per day, mill hands being paid wet or dry. In practice it is found that payment is made for twenty-five days per month at most of the mills; so that stoppages have not averaged more than two days per month, although I believe this has been exceeded in some instances.

The royalty paid to settlers varies from 2d. to 3d. per 100ft. log measurement, payable when the timber is removed. In some cases instead of money timber, is given for house-building, the quantity required for the building being delivered at once. It is obvious that arrangements of this kind are a great convenience to settlers of limited means, notwithstanding the low rates paid as royalty.

The great drawback to the prosperity of the saw-millers in the district is unquestionably the comparatively small yield of available timber per acre, and the uncertainty of obtaining future supplies. A few swampy sections which came under my notice would certainly yield over 20,000 superficial feet per acre, but these were exceptional and of very small extent; 15,000ft. per acre is considered an unusually large return; from 6,000ft. to 10,000ft. per acre may be considered a good average, but large areas cleared by the saw-millers will not come up to the lowest of these figures.

Holders of deferred-payment sections are required by the regulations to bring at least one-twentieth of the entire area under cultivation each year until one-fifth of the section is cleared and cultivated. The strict enforcement of this condition has necessarily led to the destruction of a large quantity of convertible timber, and in some instances has caused considerable loss and incon-