

most common tree, and flourishes over the greatest range of country to an altitude of 3,400 feet; but as regards the quantities of superficial feet of timber of kauri, puriri, totara, kowhai, rimu, matai, birch, &c., in the Crown lands forests, there is, as yet, only a very vague conjecture. An approximate estimate even of these quantities would prove most interesting, and is necessary to supply an intelligent basis on which to found proposals for the conservancy and utilization of the forests, and to enable us to make a calculation of the revenues which may be derived from them. M. Lecoy has recently, with your approval, furnished a very interesting report (*see* Parliamentary Paper H.—3, 1880) on this subject; and, if his anticipations as to trade could even be partially realized, it would be of immense benefit to the colony.

Without any great expense, the Land and Survey Departments can furnish an estimate of the superficial feet of timbers in the colony. It can be gone about as opportunity offers, and, when collected, can be detailed for the several forests in the "Crown Lands Guide," and shown graphically on forest maps. With the co-operation of the owners of saw-mills the annual output of timber can also be ascertained; and this, compared with the remaining stock in the forests, will show very clearly how the colony stands with regard to its timber-supply and its ability to export.

In the month of April last, in company with Mr. Percy Smith, I travelled through several of the Crown lands forests in the Hokianga and other districts north of Auckland, and was greatly struck with the majesty of the noble kauri as it stands in the forest, and the rate at which it is being used up in the numerous saw-mills.

I obtained from the Commissioner, Mr. Tole, in reply to queries, the following information:—

1. Extent of kauri-forest land in possession of the Crown?—It is estimated that the kauri forests of the Crown cover an area of about 60,000 acres.

2. Extent of kauri forest in the hands of private individuals?—The area so held is estimated to be about 170,000 acres.

3. Annual output of saw-mills from both Crown and private kauri forests?—It is computed by competent authorities that the total amount of timber cut annually in the Provincial District of Auckland is about 110,000,000 feet superficial measurement, valued at £505,000.

4. Total estimated quantity of kauri timber in the hands of the Crown and private individuals?—About 23,000,000,000 feet, calculated at the rate of two trees to the acre, each tree being estimated to contain 5,000 feet.

From these estimates it will appear that at the present rate of consumption the timber-kauri will be all used up in twenty-one years, and that the total value of the timber when brought to market will be about £11,000,000.

There are vigorous growths of young kauri in the forests; but cattle, fire, and the rolling of the logs into the streams are all against the saplings having a chance of surviving.

A kauri forest is very susceptible to fire, as, when once started, the wood will burn green. To guard against this risk, the Land Board forbids the gum-digger from the forests.

The question of the preservation and conservancy of the kauri and other timber-trees in the State forests will again be brought up when the statistics already referred to are collected, and forest maps prepared.

#### *Kauri Gum.*

The digging for this is confined, so far as the Crown lands are concerned, to the sites of ancient forests, which have no doubt been destroyed by fire, and are now open fern-land. The great area of country from which the gum is got shows that the present kauri forests are only the remnants of a very large original forest.

The gum-digging is an important industry, engaged in at all seasons by small parties of Europeans and Natives scattered all over the country, varying in total numbers from a few hundreds to two or three thousand persons, according to circumstances.

The export of gum for the twelve months ended March last was 68,430 cwt., value £176,342. A good deal of this is the produce of Native lands, and for the privilege of digging on them a royalty has to be paid to the Native owners. On the Crown lands the privilege is leased, and the digger must make his arrangements with the lessee. This is open to one or two serious objections, of which you are aware. About 81,000 acres is leased in five areas for two years, and the rents amount to £351, or about 1d. per acre.

It is worth consideration, whether the right to dig for gum on Crown lands should not be on a similar footing to the right to dig for gold, and that, under section 86 of "The Land Act, 1877," the gum-digger should get his right or license direct from the Land Office.

#### *Improvement of Lands before Sale.*

This system was instituted nearly two years ago, and the exploration and survey of road-lines and their formation through Crown lands north and south has since been actively prosecuted. A short sketch of the principal works in the different land districts will be interesting.

*Auckland.*—To the north of Auckland City there stretches away to the north for 200 miles a most interesting country of 3,000,000 acres, of which fully a million, or more than one-third, are Crown lands. It is so thoroughly intersected by bays, and harbours, and tidal rivers, that there is scarcely any part distant more than ten miles from navigable waters; but there are very few roads, and the intervening hills or forests prevent any freedom of communication between the different parts, so that each bay has its own little mixed community of Europeans and Maoris, depending on the saw-mill, or the coal mines, or the gum-diggings. In point of time, the oldest settlements in New Zealand are there; but settlement, in the sense of cultivating the ground, has made but little progress. Indeed, there are evidences that districts have retrograded from their former advance, and, excepting in the coal districts, there is an aspect of placid stagnation.

The people ought to be brought in contact with each other; and, moreover, an infusion of fresh blood and energy is wanted, for there are too few people in the country to open it up and incite each other to emulation.