

It is not easy to obtain accurate returns of the yield per acre in timber so irregularly distributed as totara: for really good forest from 40,000ft. to 50,000ft. would be a low average; but, as I have already shown, the waste is immense. In one instance in which the results were carefully worked out the average for twenty-six acres was 43,092ft. superficial; but first-class totara forest, felled in its prime, will yield from 80,000ft. to 100,000ft. or more: unfortunately forests of this character have become extremely rare.

The ruling prices for first-class totara for ordinary building purposes at the present time are from 8s. 6d. to 11s. 6d. per 100ft. superficial; second class, 6s. 6d.; bridge and wharf timber, &c., 14s. to 16s. 6d.: but contracts are occasionally taken at lower rates, which must prove unremunerative. Railway-sleepers average from 2s. 10d. to 3s. 3d. each. Totara is the chief timber employed for telegraph poles, the average prices being—for poles 20ft. long, 8in. by 8in., tapering to 6in. by 6in., 18s. each.; 25ft. long, 18s. to £1 each.; 35ft. long, 16in. by 16in., tapering to 10in. by 10in., £6 10s. to £7 each.

A small quantity of totara is exported from Napier to Sydney and Melbourne, and there is no doubt that the trade is capable of expansion; but the home demand is increasing. Auckland has long derived her chief supplies of totara from Hawke's Bay, and now Otago is being forced into the same market. With the extension of harbour works and railways in all directions, the construction of wharves and bridges, and the general preference for totara for all purposes where durability and lightness are required, the home demand must expand in a constantly-increasing ratio; and, although at the present moment competition amongst saw-millers is rather too keen, and the home supply is rather in excess of the demand, there are indications that this state of things will not last, but that the ruling rate for first-class timber for constructive works will advance. It is certain that the quantity of totara converted during the current year will be largely in excess of any previous output in this district.

I have been unable to form any precise estimate of the total quantity of totara available for conversion, but am satisfied that it is much less than is generally supposed. Answers to inquiries as to the existence of any totara forest between the Taranaki bushes and the Ruahine Mountains are disappointing and unsatisfactory. Some small virgin groves occur on Native land in the upper part of the Manawatu, and there is without doubt a considerable quantity scattered sparsely through the forest eastward of Tahoraite, but at present it is difficult of access, and its scattered distribution militates against its profitable conversion. It may ultimately be found profitable to convey this timber to the Manawatu by rolling roads or by tramways, and float the logs to booms in a lower part of the river during floods; but this course would not pay at present rates.

I am fully convinced that the present supply will be exhausted within the next ten years, even supposing that no great expansion of the demand takes place.

The timber industry of the district is of recent growth, and is a direct consequence of the construction of the Napier and Wellington Railway as far as Tahoraite. Previous to the year 1876 the district derived its chief supply of timber from Auckland; now, however, totara and less common timbers have displaced the kauri, and the import is reduced to very small dimensions. In a very definite sense the railway may be said to have created the timber industry which now supplies its most important item of freight.

The export of timber from Napier for the year ending the 31st March, 1884, amounted only to 108,115 superficial feet, valued at £624, an average of rather more than 11s. per 100ft.

During the past three years timber growing on Crown lands has been sold to the value of £309, prior to the land being thrown open for selection. Mr. Baker further states that 1,264 acres of timber lands of special value have been sold for £4,766 during the same period.

TARANAKI.

THE area of the Taranaki Provincial District comprises 2,290,000 acres, of which 729,000 acres, practically clothed with forest, are still held by the Crown, and 1,034,000 acres by the Maoris.

Before the commencement of settlement the greater portion of the district was covered with forest, but of late years especially vast portions have been cleared by the progress of settlement, and the settled area is still being extended. From the Mokau River, which forms the northern boundary of the district, southwards to Pukearuhe the forest closely approaches the sea-beach in most places; leaving that station, the forest recedes, forming a belt of open country from one to six miles in width, which is continued round Cape Egmont, until, at Hawera and Patea, its width in the broadest places is from ten to twelve miles, forming the Hawera and Patea plains, which comprise some of the best land in the colony, although it suffers severely from high winds and the total absence of sheltering wood-land.

Speaking generally, the forest is of very indifferent quality, and the proportion of convertible timber less than in any other forest district in the colony. In fact, with the exception of a few favoured localities of limited area, good timber is so sparse and scattered that saw-milling requires a much greater expenditure of labour than is necessary in other districts.

A vast portion of the forest consists of scrubby growth, or of large shrubs or trees too small to be of any value for conversion, so that in many localities there is not a single convertible tree to a square mile.

A large proportion of the serviceable contents of the forest consists of tawa, which is often well grown, and attains large dimensions, ascending from sea-level to nearly 2,000ft. Tooth-leaved and entire-leaved beeches occur on the inland ranges, but rarely in close proximity to the sea. Rata is abundant, in not a few places forming the staple of the forest, as at Manaia. Rewarewa sometimes forms continuous forest, giving a remarkable effect to the landscape when growing on the crests of