

PART I.—OUR NATIVE FORESTS.

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(A.) GENERAL REMARKS.

BEFORE it is possible to form any theories or lay down any rules as to what requires to be done in order to maintain the timber industry of New Zealand, it is of paramount importance that the present supplies of milling-timber and the areas of forest land should be definitely ascertained, so that a basis may be formed upon which the requisite calculations may be made.

For many years past it has been the aim of the Department of Lands to ascertain and publish, periodically, approximate estimates of the quantities of milling-timber still available in the various parts of this Dominion, together with particulars as to the output of the sawmills, and conditions under which the industry is carried on. In the following report it is hoped to show what amount of timber, and what different varieties of same, are still contained in each of the ten land districts of New Zealand. The Commissioners of Crown Lands, assisted by their timber experts, Crown Lands Rangers, and surveyors, have supplied descriptions of the districts, indicating as far as is in their power what extent of it is still under forest, and what milling-timber is included therein. A list of all the varieties of indigenous trees is supplied, and their qualities and uses are enumerated, whilst tables at the end of the report summarise the total quantities of timber in each district. It must, however, be borne in mind that such estimates can only be very approximate, and, though the greatest care is exercised in their compilation, yet, owing to frequently occurring causes such as fires, felling of bush, and more precise inspections of particular areas, the estimates are continually varying, and are subject to periodical revision and alteration. Their use for purposes of comparison must therefore be necessarily limited, and made with caution.

As is well known, the flora of the Dominion is of a very varied nature, and botanists give no less than eighty-six varieties of trees growing in our forests. A detailed list of same is given on page 15. Of these, however, only a few are at present used for commercial purposes, and, from a milling point of view, the choice is restricted to about a dozen timber-trees.

FOREST AREA OF NEW ZEALAND.

One of the questions frequently asked concerning the forest resources of New Zealand is, "What area of land is still covered with forest?" For climatic, water-conservation, scenic, and other purposes, besides those of the timber industry, such a phase of the subject deserves serious attention. In older countries widespread interest has been taken in ascertaining what proportion of the land is still retained in a state of nature, and it is now generally thought that a certain minimum amount is absolutely essential to the welfare of the community. A table on page 99 shows how European countries fare in this respect, and it will be noticed that the percentage of the country under forest varies in a most striking manner. Sweden has about one-half of its total area under wood, mostly timber suitable for milling purposes; Germany, now one of the foremost commercial nations, has one-quarter; but when we come to the United Kingdom we find that only 4 per cent. of the land is clothed with forest, or about one twenty-fifth of the total area. This condition of affairs is deemed most serious, and the recent British Royal Commission on Coast-erosion and Afforestation drew special attention to the matter, and the necessity for rapid extension of afforestation in the United Kingdom.

Coming to our own country, an endeavour has been made to show how we stand in this respect, and the following schedule gives the areas now reported to be covered with forest:—