

## THE TIMBER INDUSTRY.

There has been a general slump in the timber business throughout the district during the past year. Several reasons are alleged for the depression. It is a fact that the mills supplying export requirements were not cutting to any extent during the year. In the northern portion of Nelson district little improvement of any note has taken place in the industry, the timber cut being principally for local consumption. There are forty-seven mills in the district, four of them on Crown lands, and forty-three on private lands. The approximate output of timber amounts to 5,325,000 superficial feet.

In the southern portion of the district—Buller and Inangahua Counties—there are thirty-three mills, twenty-nine of them on Crown lands, and four on private lands, the output being 9,765,718 superficial feet. The total quantity of timber cut for the year is 15,090,718 superficial feet, or a shortage over last year of 1,540,869 ft. Included in this output were two small shipments of white-pine sent from the Karamea district to Australia, while a large portion was used in connection with the mining industry.

## THE FLAX INDUSTRY.

The flax industry has been practically at a standstill during the year, owing to the fallen price of fibre, £20 per ton being the lowest price realised for a number of years. There are seven mills in the northern portion of the district; five of them are in operation cutting small quantities of flax off freehold lands, the quantity of hemp produced being about 230 tons. In the southern portion of the district there are six mills, but only two have been working, and then for a few months only, the flax being obtained principally from freehold lands. About 50 tons of fibre has been produced. Notwithstanding the state of the hemp market, millers are still sanguine, and are engaged in draining swamp lands, and otherwise improving and extending their flax-growing areas.

## THE COAL INDUSTRY.

The coal industry in the northern portion of Nelson district has shown no signs of improvement during the past year. The output is very small considering the large areas held for coal-mining purposes. There are six leases current, and from only one of them is coal exported. This mine supplies local, Nelson, and Wellington markets. Prospecting is being carried on vigorously, but the results are not considered good enough to warrant expenditure on extensive works. The number of men employed in the industry is sixty. The annual output of coal amounted to 6,200 tons.

In the southern portion of the district (Buller County) the industry has made considerable progress until a few weeks ago, when a serious fire broke out in the Millerton Mine, necessitating the closing-down of the works. This was followed by the discharge (temporarily) of from four to five hundred men, and the loss of an output of coal amounting probably to 25,000 tons. The fire occurred during very dry weather, when water was unusually scarce. The mine is still closed down, but it is anticipated that the recent rains will afford a supply of water to flood the mine, and so extinguish the fire.

The Westport-Stockton Mine began operations at the beginning of the year. At this mine the most up-to-date plant in the Dominion is erected, everything in connection with the operations being worked by electricity. The output from this mine is small in comparison with that of other mines in the neighbourhood, owing to no market being obtainable. When this difficulty is surmounted it will compare favourably with other mines, as the coal is of a very good quality, while the quantity already in sight warrants many years' steady work.

The output of coal produced for the year from the Buller district amounts to 622,000 tons, an increase of 9,241 tons over the previous year.

In the Inangahua district no improvements of any moment have taken place. Large deposits exist there, and the quality is quite equal to that of any household coal in the Dominion. No market is obtainable. When an export trade is worked up this locality will become a large coal-producing district. The quantity of coal produced for the year is 12,000 tons.

The total output for the whole Nelson district for the year is 740,200 tons.

The area under lease for coal-mining purposes in Nelson district is 28,521 acres, held by sixty-six lessees.

## THE FRUIT INDUSTRY.

The fruit industry in the northern portion of this district—at Motueka, Riwaka, and neighbouring localities—flourished during the past year. Both soil and climate are favourable for fruit-growing purposes. During the year over 500 acres have been planted with apple trees. Orchardists have ascertained by experience that the apple is the most profitable fruit. During last season thousands of cases of all kinds of fruit have been exported to other parts of the Dominion. A large quantity of fruit is used at the local factories. There are two canning establishments at Motueka. In the southern portion of the district very little interest is taken in fruit-growing, although several localities are well adapted for the purpose.

## NOXIOUS WEEDS.

The eradication of the blackberry from large areas throughout Nelson district, particularly the Counties of Buller and Inangahua, is a matter which merits prompt attention. The local apathy on the subject is scandalous. Large tracts of land, principally freehold, and of excellent quality, have become almost worthless by the spread of this pest. I estimate that the area in the Inangahua Valley covered by blackberry is about 900 acres, and nearly all of this land is rich alluvial soil, excellent for agricultural purposes. It will take thousands of pounds to clean it.