

CHAPTER IV.—THE TIMBER TRADE.

1. GENERAL.

Production.—The timber produced in the Dominion for the year ended 31st March, 1934, is estimated at approximately 195,000,000 ft. board measure, or 18 per cent. higher than the quantity reported for the previous year (see Table No. 6). It is anticipated that the greater part of this increase will be accounted for by rimu, the demand for which has been stimulated both by the building subsidy policy of the Unemployment Board and the improved tone on the Australian markets.

The three species—rimu, white-pine, and insignis pine—now constitute over 80 per cent. of all timber produced in New Zealand, while the two provincial districts of Auckland and Westland are responsible for over two-thirds of the total cut. Interest in the exploitation of Westland supplies has been well maintained, more especially in white-pine, and logs of this species are being transported as far as Auckland City for the manufacture of wire-bound veneer butter-boxes.

Sawmill Statistics.—The sawmills of the Dominion, as recorded by the Forest Service, now number 534. Of these 438 are working exclusively in indigenous forests and 61 exclusively in exotic plantations. The remaining 35 mills included in the total, cut both indigenous and exotic timber. Of the total mills, 29 per cent. are closed down, 40 per cent. are working part-time only, and 31 per cent. are working full time, the year's working again showing a slight improvement on the figures for the previous period.

2. MARKETS.

Domestic.—The domestic markets showed considerable improvement during the latter part of the period under review, firmer prices and reduced discounts reflecting the improved demand for building-timbers.

Building-timbers.—A marked increase occurred in the number of new houses erected, 1,981 dwelling permits being issued in the principal towns, as compared with only 997 and 1,089 for the two corresponding years of 1933 and 1932. While the building-subsidy policy of the Unemployment Board undoubtedly accounted for the greater part of this increase, it is just as certain that some part of the improvement was the result of returning confidence in private building enterprise. Nevertheless, new housing construction falls far short of actual requirements, and to stimulate private enterprise still further it is hoped that prices will be kept as low as possible consistent with a fair return to efficient and reasonably capitalized operation.

Box and Crate Industry.—Of all the wood-using industries in New Zealand, probably only the box and crate industry has been favoured with increased demands for its products during the past four years. Coincident with marked annual increases in the production of butter and cheese, and to a lesser extent fruit, necessitating progressively increasing supplies of boxes, improved local manufacture and adverse foreign exchange conditions have led to a marked decrease in importations. Whereas only a few years ago substantial quantities of the butter, cheese, and apples exported from New Zealand were shipped in foreign containers, to-day less than 10 per cent. of the butter is so shipped, and only negligible quantities of cheese and apples.

3. IMPORTS AND EXPORTS.

General.—While the total importation of timber into New Zealand increased substantially on the extremely low figure of 1932, the total of 12,000,000 ft. board measure recorded in Table No. 7 must be considered small, when it is considered that over 7,000,000 ft. board measure consisted of Australian hardwoods, which are recognized as largely non-competitive with New Zealand timbers and essential for many of the special purposes for which they are imported.

The improvement shown in the export of timber during 1932 was largely maintained during 1933, the year's exports being almost 50 per cent. above the low record of 1931, although 5 per cent. below the 1932 exports.

Exports to Great Britain.—An account of the investigations made by the timber delegation to Great Britain in 1932-33 into the possibilities of marketing New Zealand timbers in that country was given in last year's annual report. As a result of the delegation's activities, 180,000 ft. board measure of silver-beech and 15,000 ft. board measure of rimu were delivered during the year, and the general appearance, quality, and grading of the silver-beech and the manner in which specifications were faithfully followed, called forth favourable comment from Home buyers. While the quality, &c., of the rimu was satisfactory, buyers were critical in that the specifications as regards width and length of the timber were not rigidly adhered to, and stressed that, if New Zealand hoped to market timber in Great Britain, it was essential for contracts to be strictly observed.

Export of Rimu to Australia.—The most pleasing feature of the export statistics recorded in Table No. 8 is the increased export of rimu, which was almost double the quantity shipped in 1932. In this connection, too, the trade has undoubtedly been stimulated by a delegation representing the West Coast rimu sawmillers which visited Australia during the year. If rimu continues to be exported at the same rate as now ruling, the 1934 figures will constitute the highest on record since 1924.

Exports to New Markets.—In addition to the English demand for silver-beech, which is expected to increase as the timber becomes better known, inquiries have also been received from South Africa and the United States of America. Taking all factors into consideration, the export of New Zealand timber should continue to increase steadily during the next few years.