



## BOOKS

# Shrunken Estate

THE STORY OF THE KAURI, by A. H. Reed; A. H. and A. W. Reed, 47. 6.  
(Reviewed by A.M.)

ALL New Zealanders know something about the kauri tree and its timber, and some know a great deal; but facts about kauri's majesty and value, its careless utilisation and destruction, and the lives of those who satisfied the country's timber needs, have hitherto been dispersed. Mr. A. H. Reed has gathered everything relevant into one big, sumptuous and superbly illustrated book—everything from prehistoric conditions, and the first European axe laid on the kauri, by Marion's Frenchmen in 1772, through the eras of spars for ships, and then milling and burning, up to the pitifully shrunken but guarded estate of today. The last picture in the book, a bed of kauri seedlings in the Waipoua State nursery, symbolises repentance after a long period of sinning.

Scientific fact is well blended with human records. The whole process of bush-felling and milling is set forth, from the building of the bush camp, through every step of cutting and transport, skilled and risky processes, to the fashioning of the board in the mill. The primitive sawpit sawing is described in detail. The importance of the camp cook is stressed, and there is even mention of the "breaking down" of the bushman's cheque. And the writer is a man in his middle seventies, who, as a boy, saw the glare of the fire in the Puhipuhi kauri forest, the gravest loss of the kind, and who has in recent years given us an admirable history of the kauri gum industry.

There are things to fascinate, or to draw gasps or tears. There is reason to believe that the Coromandel ranges produced a kauri 28 feet in diameter, and another over 70 feet in girth. One of the giants of Waipoua, now dead, was certified as 66 feet in girth

LEFT: One of the giant kauris growing in Waipoua Forest

and 100 feet clean to the first limb. Mr. Reed recognises that a great deal of the kauri had to go to give us houses and farms, but he is prepared to believe that the prodigious output of the industry was surpassed by what was wasted accidentally or wantonly. Governments cheerfully sold stands of kauri without thought of the morrow. I can remember kauri timber at ten shillings a hundred feet, and we put it into anything from shelves to ships. The Government actually used it for street paving, and some was exported for the same purpose.

However, Mr. Reed's very special service is to have recorded experiences and photographic portraits of the old bushmen, members of the significantly named Pre-War I Kauri Bushmen's Association. James Cowan did New Zealand a similar service when he interviewed, at the last moment, survivors on both sides for his history of the Maori Wars. There will always be felling and milling in New Zealand, but never again can there be handling of such trees in isolated tumbled terrain with gear inferior to today's.

There are many sketches throughout the letterpress, but the glory of the illustrations lies in the supplementary "Pictorial Record." The 270 pictures there, nearly all of them photographs, cover the growing kauri and every stage of its conversion into timber. Perhaps the most impressive are those of trees actually falling, and the use of creek dams to get the logs away. Among the many who have helped Mr. Reed, I

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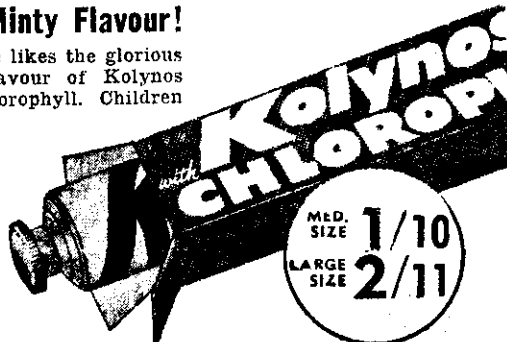
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