

Our Industries.

No. XV.—THE TIMBER INDUSTRY OF NEW ZEALAND.

(ILLUSTRATIONS BY COURTESY OF NEW ZEALAND DEPARTMENT OF LANDS.)

A VALUABLE, INCREASING INDUSTRY DRIFTING FAST TOWARDS EXTINCTION.

The Past.

TIME was when the forests of these islands appeared to be destined to a permanence almost eternal. So great was the profusion of the timbers, so vast the extent of the forests, and so impenetrable the growth of the underwood. These forests were of exquisite beauty, of great variety, and adorned with ferns, vines and orchids as rare in quality as they were abundant in quantity. They sheltered a bird life of considerable extent and unique character, and their flora was enriched by a profusion of blossoms of rare attractiveness. They covered the hill-sides; they filled the valleys; they spread over the plains of large areas of both islands. In the north the Kauri and Puriri had their habitat; the Rimu, though seen everywhere, was most conspicuous in the

southern districts of the North Island and in the west of the South Island, while the white pine was common to all the country, and the birches flourished particularly in the south. The explorer filled his reports with the variety of the timbers, and narrated the wonders of the bird songs which awoke him in the early morning; the poet dilated on the stateliness and beauty of the forest, the painter revelled in the marvellous woodland scenes, and the practical farmer cut down the timber whenever he got the chance. Years passed; much of the forest disappeared before the march of settlement, until whole areas lost their woods, and it gradually began to dawn upon the minds of the thoughtful that the days of the forest primeval were gone.

The Present.

At present the contents of the forests remaining for the use of the colonist are approximately known, the census of the various timbers having been taken in the year 1904, and the result embodied the following year in the Parliamentary paper-C-6.

From this it appears that the total quantity of milling timber standing at the end of the year 1904 in the forests of the colony, public, private, and Maori-held, was about 41,724,574,800 feet.

Now another table in the same paper showed the rate of consumption, by the various sawmills of the colony, to be in the aggregate 336,470,000 superficial feet. But 400 million will hardly suffice as an estimate allowing for accidents. At that rate per annum of consumption the supply visible as brought to book above will last a little over a century. But the rate of consumption is sure to increase: for example, the output of 1905 exceeded that of 1904 by the respectable total of 41,000,000 sup-feet. The rate of consumption, it is safe to assume, is an increasing rate. On the other hand there is an idea among the experts that the official computation of the supply requires supplementing, so that it is safe to allow for some increase on the figures of the official table. Still again there is the danger of fire, which yearly destroys a quantity of the forest, particularly of the Kauri timber, which is peculiarly inflammable. The departmental estimate of the duration of the supply, after consideration duly given to all these matters, is seventy years. It is a rough computation at the best, but even if it be an underestimate, there is no comfort in the fact, as it leaves undisturbed the conclusion that the once glorious and apparently eternal forests of the country are within a distance of extermination.



KAURI TREE.



CROSSCUTTING THE FELLED TREE.



HAULING LOGS TO CREEK FOR "DRIVE."