

Timber Resources of Australia

Some interesting facts concerning the forest products in the Antipodes.

By JOHN D. MACFARLANE

SOME months ago the "Canadian Forestry Magazine" had an article on the timber resources of the world and made mention of the area of forest in Australia. The writer lived in Australia for twenty-two years, and has visited all the States except the Northern territory. The area best known to him is the coastal region of Queensland.

This territory extends from Cape York in the north, about S. Lat. 10, to the New South Wales boundary, about S. Lat. 29. There is a small coastal plain of varying width, and to the crest of the range it receives a fairly abundant rainfall. Some parts have an excessive rain, averaging, for a belt of perhaps 300 miles, 180 inches per annum. In rich soil, and a permanent Summer climate, this makes for a wonderful growth, as the growing season never stops. This strip of Queensland is as large as Cuba, and all the British West Indies, and probably has richer potential resources.

It already has a large cane sugar business, and fairly well-started banana and pineapple plantations, also experimental plots of cotton, arrowroot, rice, and sundry other tropical products. As yet only a small part of the area has been brought into cultivation, as clearing the dense scrub is a costly operation.

The writer is a mining man, and no botanist or timber expert, but anyone who has seen the Queensland forest cannot doubt that this timber wealth must some day become a factor in the world's markets. It is particularly rich in Cabinet woods, of beautiful grain and color, and has besides a supply of more common grades for general use. In the latter class, there is cedar, which will compete in size with the famed cedars of British Columbia, and a pine called Kauri pine, larger than our eastern Canadian white pine. In the mines at Charters Towers the trees used for mine timber and fuel were ironbark, bloodwood, lancewood, and flindersia.

The ironbark has a hard corrugated bark, like an old oak, and makes a good steam fuel. The bloodwood got its name from the intensely red sap. A large tree cut down at the right time makes a very slaughter house appearance on the ground. It is

probable that a valuable dye may be secured from this tree. Other common trees in general use as timber, are:—Crowfoot elm, beech, bean tree, silky-oak, figtree, kauri gum, Ti-tree (pronounced tee) and gidyea.

Names Inappropriate

The early settlers named the trees, which were strange to them, according to no system at all. The silky oak, for instance, is not in the least like an oak. Its foliage consists of needles, pointed like rushes in our marshy places, somewhat larger than our white pine needles. The timber is beautifully grained, and is much used for interior finish in buildings. The white cedar is not a cedar, but a leafed tree; our nearest foliage is perhaps the black cherry. This tree is a thing of beauty when in flower; the tree is literally covered with hanging tassels of blooms, scented like a lilac, and is a great attraction for butterflies, bees, and honey-eating insects. The writer had several of these in his Australian garden. The flowers develop into a fruit, which brought flocks of flying foxes every evening, till they were all consumed. The timber of this is considered excellent for chests and cabinet work generally. The Moreton Bay ash, is not in the least like an ash of the Northern hemisphere; the same may be said of the beech; and there are two trees named fig, from the leaf being somewhat like. One of these figs grows a very large size, and in the tropical jungle of Queensland is often covered with parasite growths, including orchids.

The finest cedar district was the Baron River Country. This has now been mostly all cut out, and young trees take a long time to mature. At the first opening of the cedar area, here, the timber getters (that is the Australian expression for lumbermen) attempted to run the logs down the Barron River over the falls, which have one drop of 680 feet. The result was that practically all the logs were broken into matchwood. Others who had logs cut in the bush, left them there for many years, till the railway was run up the ranges from Cairns. This cedar is a high-priced article. When the Atherton scrub lands were opened, and divided into small farms, on a table-land, or

rather shelf, about 1,200 feet above sea level, in the range, the cedar was all reserved to the Crown. These farms run from 80 to 320 acres and sold at ten shillings per acre to bona fide settlers. One man took up 160 acres, which was reported to carry no cedar. After he had cleared up what the law required, and secured his title, he found one solitary huge cedar, which he sold as it stood, for one hundred pounds sterling—and he only paid eighty pounds for the farm; a profit for this one tree of twenty-five per cent. on his land.

The Eucalyptus Family

The most common family of trees in Australia is the eucalyptus, commonly called "gum-tree". There are several varieties, which shed the bark annually, and retain the leaves. The leaves do fall from time to time, but there is no general fall as in Canada. This family of trees stand drought well, and are more common on the inland side of the ranges than on the more moist area toward the sea. The leaves are a dull grey-green color, and hang with the edge to the sun, which seems a provision of Nature to prevent evaporation. Another widely spread family is the Wattle. This is not so large a tree as the eucalyptus, but the blossom is almost a national emblem. Budding poets of the Commonwealth, do not seem to consider themselves rightly entered into the temple of the muses, until they get off an apostrophe to the wattle blossom.

Going inland, beyond the coast range, the character of the forest changes greatly. The dense undergrowth and vines disappear in the drier atmosphere and many of the coastal trees do not cross the range. Going inland further a second ridge is crossed and then comes the bare treeless plains, or "downs" as this is called in Australia. That is the real sheep country. These plains have a deep black soil, which, when wet is very tenacious. A man carries a garden on each boot in wet weather. If the coastal rains were divided up with the "downs", it would be the garden of the world, as the soil is rich, and they could grow crops the year round, in North and Central Queensland. In the Atherton scrub

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