

THE TOKANUI MENTAL HOSPITAL ESTATE.*

KING-COUNTRY DEVELOPMENT.

By J. DRYSDALE, Estate Manager.

THE Tokanui Mental Hospital Estate comprises about 5,000 acres, situated to the southward of Kihikihi, on the northern limit of the district that is still known as the King-country. The boundary of the property extends to the Puniu, the river that for many years was recognized as marking the division between the pakeha and the Maori. That division, however, no longer remains: large areas of the tribal lands have been acquired by the State, and the European settler has also secured through the Native Land Boards assured leases for lands that aggregate hundreds of thousands of acres. The district south of the Puniu embraces a territory that is being rapidly developed. The settlers who are doing this are drawn from all parts of the Dominion, and if mistakes are to be avoided many of the methods that are profitably practised elsewhere must be discarded here. The district already supplies an important addition to the production of the Dominion, and it is safe to say that the volume of its output will immensely increase in the near future.

The general features of the district and of the Tokanui property are those of low hills, wide valleys, and swamps, some of the latter being of considerable extent. The hills are in the greater proportion ploughable and suitable for cultivation. The open valleys are extensive, and the swamps easily drained and decidedly fertile.

The natural vegetation is bracken-fern, manuka, and tutu (taupaki), with a proportion of flax (*Phormium*), toetoe, and koromiko. Introduced shrubs are gorse and broom, and with these is a heath that forms a very conspicuous feature when in flower. It is said to have been brought from South Africa, and to have escaped from confinement in the gardens of the earlier settlers of Pirongia—then known as Alexandra. There are but few native trees in the northern part of the King-country, and there are not any on the Tokanui property.

The soil is popularly described as of a semi-volcanic nature. It varies from a loam to a clay of comparatively open texture. Both the loam and the clay contain pumice in very varying proportions. These soils—with which the farmer and grazier are concerned—rest upon a rhyolitic formation which is in the form of rock of every degree of texture and appearance. Some of the rocks are soft, being

* At the request of local settlers and certain public bodies in the King-country it has been arranged to publish from time to time in the *Journal* accounts of farming operations on the Tokanui Mental Hospital Estate. It is the aim of the authorities to develop this property systematically on the best lines, and the experience gained should thus be of considerable value to the district generally. The present notes by Mr. Drysdale serve as an introduction to the proposed series.—EDITOR.