

The KAURI

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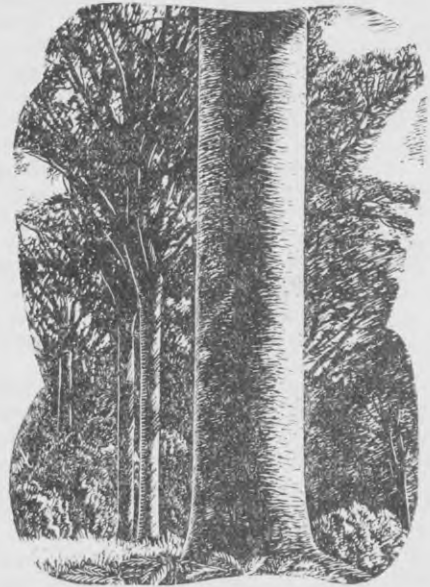


THE KAURI-TREE of New Zealand ranks with the world's noblest and most valuable timber trees. The kauri is one of about twenty species of trees belonging to the genus *Agathis*. The other species range over the Melanesian Islands, the Malay Archipelago, and Cochin China. Closely related to *Agathis* is the Norfolk Island pine and the Monkey Puzzle, members of the genus *Araucaria*. The immense and tall bole, with spreading head, some of the branches being as large as ordinary trees, give an imposing appearance to the kauri. The kauri has rather large, oval, shining, green leaves and globular cones. Mature trees may attain a height of 150 ft. with a trunk of up to 15 ft. or even up to 22 ft. in diameter. In New Zealand the kauri is found from the North Cape district as far south as Kawhia on the west to Maketu in the Bay of Plenty. It is found also on the Great and Little Barrier Islands and on the Poor Knights.

Since its discovery by Marion du Fresne in 1772, the kauri has been much sought after for its timber, with the inevitable result that kauri forests now are fragmentary compared with their former size. Spars made from the young trees, or rikas, as they are called, were valued by the British Navy for masts; and in these and the timber of the large trees a brisk export trade sprang up in the early part of last century. On one occasion the Navy landed at Portsmouth a spar 110 ft. long. Since that time the trade in kauri timber has flourished, but the product has far exceeded the growth, so that a definite limit is set for future supplies.

The wood of the kauri holds first place among the timbers of New Zealand. It is light, durable, straight-grained, easily worked, free from knots, and takes a smooth and silky surface. It has been put to every kind of use for which timber is suitable. Outside work, such as wharves and bridges, houses, joinery, furniture, and so on, are a few of the uses to which kauri timber has been put.

Besides timber, another product of the kauri-tree must be mentioned. This is a resin, the so-called "kauri-gum," which is obtained either from the living tree or from the ground formerly occupied by kauri forests. Sometimes the export value of kauri-gum has exceeded that of



the timber. Kauri-gum has formed an important ingredient in the manufacture of varnishes and has other uses. The digging of kauri-gum in swamps and the manuka-covered hills of the Auckland district has attracted multitudes of individual workers or gum-diggers, who, as with gold-diggers, generally sell their gains individually.