

down. The stock is then removed to the next paddock, then to a third and fourth, by which time the first paddock is ready again for pasturing. Experiments of various descriptions have been made by Mr. Williams as to gorse-culture, and the fattening of stock, into the particulars of which it would not be expedient to enter here. Suffice it to say that land which formerly would not feed a sheep to the acre has been made to carry and fatten five and six sheep to the acre when planted with gorse. It has been proved beyond a doubt that our gum-lands are capable of being thus cultivated to good purpose, and, as this is a matter of such great importance to the country north of Auckland, your Commissioners would venture to suggest the advisability of Government following up these experiments by setting apart a portion of our poor gum-lands as an experimental farm for gorse-pasture only, and by issuing pamphlets from time to time, giving the best courses of procedure, in order to instruct our settlers how to proceed to put these clay-lands to a profitable use. It is in view of the prospect of this future usefulness of the poor gum-lands that your Commissioners recommend that prompt steps should be taken to put a stop to the wanton burning-off of the scant vegetation thereon, and a heavy fine should attach to any digger burning more than about a chain square at a time. It would be still better if "burning-off" on gumfields could be prohibited altogether.

12. Another use to which our gumfields might be put is the planting of marketable and useful trees. On many parts of the gumfields—more especially those which have escaped the ravages from fires—the natural growth (tea-tree and fern) is sufficiently high and thick to make tree-planting rather precarious on account of fires, but no such objection could be urged to planting pipeclay lands, which carry only small stumpy tea-tree and fern of a foot or less in height, or those clay lands from whence the little soil has disappeared by reason of repeated burnings. It is strange, but true, that several of the European and Australian trees will grow where the top soil has disappeared, and where neither fern nor tea-tree seems able to start growing again. Judicious tree-planting therefore, and more especially the sowing of seeds of suitable grasses, which on many parts of the gumfields have proved a success, would be of immense benefit to the North, and assist in gradually transforming the waste of clay and gum-lands into useful country. The cost of any seed-sowing or tree-planting would, of course, be a legitimate charge against the export duty, which your Commissioners recommend further on.

13. Regarding the permanency of the gumfields, a mass of contradictory opinions expressed by the various witnesses will be found amongst the evidence accompanying this report. In many cases the opinions given—that the fields would soon be exhausted—have reference only to the particular part of the gumfield on which the witnesses happened to live, or with which they were familiar: not a few of those best acquainted with our gumfields as a whole consider that the present generation will not see the end of the gum industry in New Zealand, and your Commissioners are strongly of opinion that this will be fully verified. Fresh fields and new layers of gum are being constantly discovered, and immense areas of the known old fields have only been touched here and there, or have practically been only "skimmed over." It is all but certain that systematic and co-operative working of the fields will in years to come replace the present working by individual diggers, and fields now abandoned will be reworked. It has been urged that the gradual decrease of gum export since the time the first Commission reported in 1893 to the present time is a proof positive that the gum is getting scarcer. Such, however, is not the case. In 1893 there was a great over-production of gum, and this, together with the commercial crisis in America, Europe, &c., in subsequent years brought about a drop in the price of gum of £15 per ton in round numbers. Soon after the mining boom began in New Zealand the timber trade became exceedingly brisk. Thousands of those employed at gum-digging left that occupation and found work on the goldfields and in the forests, and of course the output of gum proportionately diminished. It is a matter for congratulation that this turn of events took place, for it at once relieved a glutted market, and raised the price to its former height. At the present time, as already stated, the price is higher than ever before in the annals of the gum industry. The export during last year (1897) was 6,450 tons. Roughly speaking, the requirements of the trade in London and New York—our two principal markets for kauri-gum—are 8,000 tons per annum, and hence the large rise in price. To insure good prices in the markets the output of gum must be restricted to the above tonnage per annum, and special encouragements to go upon the gumfields should on no account be given; legislation, indeed, should be entirely in the opposite direction, lest we be made to pass through a season