

concerning the Savings-banks, Government debentures, &c. In one locality two Austrians have started a store for the purpose of supplying their countrymen on the adjoining gum-fields, and so breaking the monopoly of the local storekeeper.

20. One complaint of the British gum-digger and the settler is that the Dalmatian is rapidly depleting the resources of the gumfields. Another complaint is that the quantities of gum brought into the market by the Austrians serve to lower the market price. Yet another complaint is that the Austrian's ignorance of the English language prevents him understanding market quotations, and makes him accept any price for his gum that the storekeeper chooses to give, thus lowering the general value, and supplying a reason why storekeepers prefer Austrian diggers on their leases. These complaints are supplemented by the further objection urged by the ordinary citizen of New Zealand—namely, that the resources of the colony are exploited, and their value sent away without any adequate return. The difficulty caused by the presence of these foreigners cannot be met without serious consideration, but it is imperative that that consideration should contain the germ of prompt and resolute action. The cry of the unthinking, that a poll-tax should be levied on the Austrian immigrant, is unworthy of notice. The bond of international reciprocity and good feeling between Great Britain and Austria would at once prevent such a solution being seriously considered. Your Commissioners believe that if it is impossible to turn back the tide of foreign immigration from the gumfields, it may perhaps be directed into profitable channels. The Austrians—laborious, energetic, resourceful, well-behaved—would make admirable settlers, could we utilise the qualities they at present display.

21. If blocks of land of good quality could be set aside for them, as well as for other gum-diggers, on which they could make their homes, many of them would doubtless turn their knowledge of wine and olive-culture to good account. Twenty-acre sections would be sufficiently large, and, if some of these blocks were selected near harbours or tidal creeks, the experience of these people as fishers would doubtless be of great help. But, at first, they should be grouped near each other. This is necessary, because they are generally ignorant of the English language, and would find reliance in mutual support and neighbourhood. If during a portion of the year they employed themselves upon the gumfield, and the rest of their time upon their farms, the money obtained by their industry as diggers would find legitimate outlet in adding to, instead of subtracting from, the resources of the colony. We are of opinion that the younger men—that is, from one-half to two-thirds of those now in the colony—would avail themselves of the offer of land, either as freehold or lease. Your Commissioners are of opinion that, even while such blocks are being sought for and surveyed, the ordinary land-laws of the colony should be translated into Dalmatian, so that those who wish to become settlers at once may have the opportunity of doing so, and thus investing the money they save.

22. Whether the proposal to attempt such a scheme of settlement for those Austrians now in New Zealand be approved or not, we respectfully point out that means must be adopted to prevent the spread of such further immigration, as the supply of both gum and land is by no means inexhaustible. We therefore advise that due notice be given that after a certain date—say, six months hence—no person excepting a settler will be allowed to hold a gum-digger's license in New Zealand till after a twelve months' residence in the colony. In such a case, an immigrant on arrival must either at once take up land, or find some other employment than gum-digging, until qualified by a year's residence. Authorised persons should be empowered to demand the production of his license from any person found digging gum, and a heavy penalty should be inflicted upon unlicensed gum-diggers. The fee for a license should be but nominal—say 1s.—just enough to cover cost of issue thereof; and every license issued should be signed by the applicant, to prevent transfer to others.

Your Commissioners would urge upon your Excellency and upon Government the pressing nature of the Austrian difficulty. At Mangawhai, for instance, if the four hundred Austrians at present encamped in the vicinity stay for another season the greater part of the remaining deposits of gum there will be swept away, and it will be idle for the settlers to attempt to dig for that material near their holdings in the future. Their land is not of the best quality, and it is asserted that, if the settlers cannot procure a little gum now and then to provide them with ready money, they cannot obtain a living from their farms, and will probably have to abandon them.

23. Complaints have been made from all parts of the gumfields for some years as to the prevalence of what is called "the truck system"—that is, of payment being made in goods instead of in cash. "The Truck Act, 1891," being a statute dealing with the relation