

*Robert Griffen*: I am a gum-digger on Mitchelson's Lease. I produce my pass-book (Mitchelson's store), and the following are some of the prices charged therein: Sugar, 4d. per pound, as against 3d. per pound elsewhere; coffee, 2s. per pound; tea, 3s. per pound, as against 2s. per pound elsewhere; potatoes, 12s. per hundredweight, as against 8s. per hundredweight elsewhere; a billy, charged 2s. 6d., as against 1s. 3d. elsewhere. When we come in with our gum to Mitchelson Brothers' store, on the field, the man in charge says, "Here is so much a hundredweight for your gum," and that you have got to take. If we owe anything for stores that is deducted, and the balance handed over to us. The market price for rescraped gum in the papers was £5 10s. and upwards, but we received £4 2s. 6d., and subsequently only £3 12s. 6d., after deducting 1s. 6d. for carriage. There was a difference of from 10s. to 12s. per hundredweight between prices we received and the prices quoted in the local market. The agreement that we dig gum on Mitchelson's Lease we signed, but have no copy. The agreement is not stamped.

*John Brown*: I am a gum-digger on Mitchelson's Lease. The stores I get from the store are weighed in my own spring-balance, and they are correct, making a fair allowance for wrappings, &c. I weighed 6 cwt. of my gum, and it was 10 lb. short, allowing a pound for the bag. I told him that the scales were wrong. He screwed a nut up at the back of the scales, which made a difference of 6 lb. in the 6 cwt. We feel sure we will have to leave working gum at Mitchelson's Lease after giving this evidence. The Austrians average fifteen to one Britisher on this lease. The Austrians suffer to the same extent, if not more, than the Britisher from this truck system. If any of us working on this lease buy stores or sell gum to any one else except at the store on the field we get twenty-four hours' notice, even if dealing with Mitchelson's store in Dargaville, where things are cheaper. We are permitted to buy butchers' meat outside of the stores. About two years ago an elderly gum-digger, by name John Palmer, made a little garden near his place on the lease, about a chain by half a chain, and he was selling some onions to the diggers at 2d. per pound. He was ordered off, the price of onions being from 3d. to 4d. at the store; but he was allowed to remain on the understanding that he only sold his produce to the store. This old man averaged about 5s. a week at gum-digging. The cost of living on the lease, including tobacco, ranges from 18s. 6d. to £1 a week.

*Herbert Basil Cox*: I am a market-gardener at Ahikiwi, and sell to any one, generally to the storekeepers. This year I have not sold any produce to gum-diggers on Mitchelson's Lease. I might have sold some potatoes. I get 1½d. for onions from the storekeepers now. I have sold them two years ago at 1d. to Brown and Campbell. I was not aware that the diggers on Mitchelson's Lease were prohibited from dealing with me, but I often wondered why they did not purchase some of my produce. I have not done any gum-digging myself for four years. I sent down a ton of potatoes last week to Brown and Campbell, at 7s. 6d. a hundredweight.

*John Goodall*: I am a gum-digger on Mitchelson's Lease. I sold gum eight days before Christmas at Flax-mill Store, Mitchelson's Lease, and I weighed my gum. I went on the scales myself, and registered 10 st. I said, "Your scales are wrong," and the storekeeper told me to fetch the policeman up. Then I went up to the store about 2 chains away and weighed myself again, and registered 10 st. 5 lb. (both Mitchelson Brothers' scales). I went to Trounson's scales (butcher), and weighed 10 st. 7 lb. Mr. Flavell, here present, was a witness to these different weighings.

*Charles Flavell*: I am a gum-digger on Mitchelson's Lease, and was present when John Goodall weighed himself in Mitchelson's stores. It did not take ten minutes to go through the different weighings.

*Jacob Radatich*: I am from Croatia, in Austria. I am a settler in the Marlborough Settlement. I have 150 acres of land under lease in perpetuity. I landed in Australia in 1891, and went to the mines at Broken Hill. I came to New Zealand in 1893. I was digging gum at Babylon. I heard from some of my countrymen and others that they were making good wages at gum-digging, and that is the reason why I went to Babylon. I paid my own passage from Australia to New Zealand. When I went to Babylon I made inquiries as to the best place to dig gum, and asked about the men who were there, and I found an old school-mate of mine in one of the camps, so I went across to him. I then returned to the store, and ordered some goods. I asked the storekeeper should I pay him at once, and he said it would do at the end of the month. He made no charge for rent for my digging, nor royalty; nothing was said on the subject. I dug for two months there, and from Babylon I went to another part of the lease. Subsequently I was one of a party of twenty-two Austrians who tried to drain Johnson's Swamp. This did not prove a profitable job, and I thereupon gave up gum-digging, and ultimately settled in the Marlborough Settlement. My opinion is that many from Austria came here simply through reports and advice from their own relations and friends. They would hear at Home about their doing well, and hence come out to try their luck. I have not heard of any Austrians coming under contract to Mitchelson or any other storekeepers. It is not true. I have heard grumbings amongst the Austrians that the prices paid for gum was too low. I never heard that Mitchelson gave short weight, as nearly every one of the Austrians has a scale of his own. The prices of the goods supplied were just as cheap as anywhere else. It cost me to live when I was gum-digging 15s. a week. While digging on the swamp, with the twenty-two of us, we lived as well as, or better than, the British gum-digger, as our bills would prove. We had beef, fowls, &c., and I am sure it costs us never less than 15s. a week. Every week we got 130 lb. of beef. Every three weeks or fortnight we got a pig, and cured it ourselves. In the summer time our earnings averaged £1 or £2 or £3 a week. In the winter time it took us all our time to make £1 a week in the best of fields. The way we work the fields is on the face, and we put everything through. Those that jump about from place to place very seldom make much at it. Sometimes when we are on Johnson's Swamp we dig a face 5 ft., 6 ft., or even 18 ft. deep if a log leads the gum down. We took it in three lifts. We were working on the co-operative