

gum-digger can give anything towards it. The time is past. If this had come on fifteen or twenty years ago probably it would have altered the case. The gum has gone that could be easily got, and the gum now being got is procured with such difficulty that I do not see how the digger can be taxed more than he is now. The ordinary gum-lands have been turned over so frequently that I do not think a man who digs now could be taxed specially. I do not consider that an export duty would be a just measure, if that duty had to be paid by the digger; but if it could be arranged that the duty should not fall upon him I think that it would be a desirable thing. If it is true that kauri-gum is a unique product, and buyers must have it at any price, then I think that a duty would be feasible, and under properly guarded regulations the sale of the gum could be advantageously adjusted. We have on the field many elderly men who were used to following others and getting a meagre living from what they could pick up. Now, the Austrians work their ground in a very thorough and exhaustive manner, and the elderly men following persons of this nationality cannot succeed in obtaining any living at all; consequently the presence of the Austrians on the field causes the old men to require aid from the Charitable Aid Board sooner than they would if the field had only been worked by ordinary diggers. The principal expenses of the Charitable Aid Board is put to is in connection with men who have to seek medical advice and rations in Auckland, all of which is charged against the North of Auckland Board. The rest of the expenditure is for old men and families to whom assistance must be given in the district. The expenditure of the Charitable Aid Board was not so heavy some years ago. I cannot speak with authority, as I have only recently been appointed Chairman of the Charitable Aid Board. I believe the presence of the Austrians on the gumfields is a growing evil, but consider it a very difficult question to deal with. The presence of Austrians here in large numbers will have the effect of increasing the charitable-aid expenditure, inasmuch as old gum-diggers will not be able to make a living as they have hitherto. Supposing that it be proved true that kauri-gum is a unique product, and that no other article could compete with it, then I believe an export duty could be levied if the export duty could be ear-marked specially for the local bodies to expend on charitable aid and maintenance of roads in the northern districts. The maximum rates levied by counties and Road Boards are 1½d. in the pound; of that, generally speaking, ½d. goes towards charitable-aid fund, and the rest towards public works and other expenses. I am the owner of 500 acres of land, part of which is gum-land. I do not find it profitable to try to keep the diggers out. It was unfenced. I never made a charge against them for digging on the ground. Part of the land which I had fenced in I ploughed up, and got gum from, and then put it in grass. The Whangarei County Council attempted the collection of gum-license fees some years ago, but it was abandoned because it was found that the collection would cost as much as the license-fees were worth, probably more.

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CAMPBELL'S LEASE, RUAKAKA, 28TH JANUARY, 1898.

*Raphael Claridge*: I come from Dalmatia. I was a sailor, and worked on a farm, on which I earned 2s. 6d. a day. I was told about New Zealand from friends of mine. I went to Australia first, but I did not stay there any time. I came to New Zealand. I came here straight, and have been here for two years. I paid my own passage here. Some of us were assisted in coming here, and have repaid the passage-money since. In our party there are four or five married men and thirty single men. We are not doing much. Some of us are saving from £2 to £3 a month. We are not working on the co-operative system here. Some of us get 40 lb., 50 lb., and 60 lb. of gum, the price being from £2 10s. to £2 15s. per hundredweight. We pay 12s. each royalty to Neil Campbell for working on this ground. We buy our stores from him; he charges the same rates as other storekeepers. We must sell our gum to him. He gives a fair price for the gum. We get our gum sometimes 2 ft. or 3 ft. deep, sometimes 6 ft. The gum is found here in several layers; the lower layer seems to be the better gum. There is a good proportion of "sugar" amongst this. It is principally darkish and brown gum. There is also white gum, which is the most valuable. As a rule we spear for gum, taking it out wherever we find it. Occasionally it is found advisable to work the gum on the face. Each man keeps his own gum. Sometimes two or three are mates. As a rule, we work in small parties, dividing the gum equally. There are about twenty to twenty-five Maoris working in this swamp. There are about ten Britishers. About seventy altogether. There are about three hundred Austrians working at Mangawhai Swamp. Some have been here from three to four years. As a rule, those going back have saved from £100 to £150. £100 would enable us to live three years at Home—that is, supposing there is no family. If good and suitable land were offered to us a good many would settle here; plenty of young fellows would stop. The young men would rather stop here if suitable opportunity to stay was given, because if they go Home they are sure to be drafted into the army for three or four years. Some of us have completed our service, and can go Home without being in danger of being drafted into the army again. I think it would be a good thing to have the land-laws translated into the Dalmatian language, and I think a good many Austrians would take advantage of the settlement conditions. We grow at Home any of the fruits, vines, &c. This swamp would be a good place for anything to grow, but it would be hard work to drain it. Most of my countrymen at Mangawhai are from Istria and Dalmatia.

[Eight Austrians present were asked if they agreed with what had been said by the witness, and answered in the affirmative.]

*Henry Serjeant*: I am a settler of fourteen years' standing, at Ruakaka. We had a store once on this swamp, and bought gum between here and Waipu for five years. At the present time the average is ¾ cwt. a week. Once, in the early days, it was about 1½ cwt. a week. The price of the gum then was about £2 per hundredweight, and the price of the gum is now £2 15s. Storekeepers