

when I first came charged just what they liked. The average cost was about £1 a week; it is now about 10s. While we had a store the average number of diggers would be about forty. Ours was the only store for some time. A greater part of this field was then a private one. The digging was free on the private land; no fee was charged. It is only a summer field, and the output for the season may have been 40 tons; but for several years scarcely anybody was digging at all. I do not think this field will be exhausted for several years to come. There are many fields where the average is not $\frac{3}{4}$ cwt. a week. We gave up buying gum because the market was bad, and we lost money on the transactions. In the days when I was in business the diggers did not work as deep as they do now, but it was all spearing work. It is all paddocking work now. During my time very few Austrians were on the field. I gave up business in 1892. My personal experience of the Austrians while in the gum business was that they were not desirable diggers, as they only spent about 2s. 6d. a week, getting their supplies probably from the sea-beaches, in the shape of fish and pipis; but Mr. Campbell, who is supplying them now, states that they are living as well as other diggers are. We started the first year and did very well, and we sent our gum to an agent in Auckland, who served our interests well. The second year we sent our gum to the same agent. Though the price we saw in the papers was just the same, we did not get anything like that price, but 5s. to 10s. a hundredweight under. There is evidently something wanting in the way of regulating the prices of gum to be paid to the purchaser. In my time gum-buyers were entirely dependent upon the dictum of their agents and of the purchasers in Auckland. If some means could have been devised, or could be devised even now, whereby a guarantee would be given to the producer that he would obtain a fair market rate for the gum, a great step in the way of improving the industry would take place. My experience has been this: that if a man has not sufficient money to be in a position to hold the gum when fair prices are not being offered, he is better out of the business, as then he will be completely at the mercy of those through whose hands his gum has to pass in Auckland. The question of the gum industry contributing towards the maintenance of the roads has never been prominent in this part of the country, as we have shipped all our gum from Marsden Point, and the road there is through sandy soil, and is equally good in winter as in summer. I think Austrians should be made to settle here—to take up a homestead—instead of digging the gum and sending the money away to Austria. It is very unfair to the settlers here to have the gum, which might be a resource to them, removed without any equivalent in return from them to the country. I do not think that the Austrians, even if the Government were to place a good block of land at their disposal, would settle upon it in any large numbers. When they cannot get the gum they will go.

WAIPU JUNCTION.

Kenneth McDonald: I am a storekeeper at the Waipu Junction. I have been there since 1854. At that time the gum was lying about the surface of the ground, and could be collected in heaps. The price was about £4 per ton, but the gum has gradually been growing scarcer, and the price has risen considerably. I do not think there have been more than a hundred diggers at any one time on the field. It was about four years ago that the Austrians came here. I have not had any transactions in gum with them, but have had the ordinary transactions with regard to stores. I have always found them very honest. I have been informed that one storekeeper who has leased fields will not allow any diggers on his field but Austrians. I believe that the fairest way to meet the increased expenditure on the roads caused by the gum traffic would be to put on an export duty, but I should prefer to see it arranged in such a way that the money so raised should be spent on the northern districts—on roads and charitable aid. The cost should not fall upon the digger himself, but on the trade. I believe all the Austrians are making money, and that some British diggers are making money, and the settlers find it a great help to be able to sell a little gum now and then. There are very few elderly men on the field; they used to be more numerous than at present. Some of the older diggers have already come on the North Auckland Charitable Aid Board for help. I think that for the old people some provision should be made, either by an export duty or some other means. I should like to see a considerable number of the Austrians settled on the land, as they are very good men at vines and in the growing of other fruits. It is the practice of the diggers on this field to work in the swamps in the summer time and on the hills in the winter time, and most of them are therefore keeping in this district. If the ordinary gum-digger received the offer of a block of Government land on which to settle, I doubt whether he would avail himself of it; but, still, it could be tried.

Bernard McLaughlin: I have been a storekeeper at Waipu Central for six years and a half. I buy gum from the diggers, of which there are ten to twelve close to Waipu. There are no Austrians that I know of. The class of men are elderly, and are only just able to get tucker. About three men save each £1 a week. My own opinion is that the gum is getting very scarce and hard to find. I have had no dealings in gum with Austrians except ordinary store transactions for cash. The Austrians are a very superior class of men as far as honesty is concerned. The Austrians have gone through this field and remained here for about a year, shifting about. I have seen a party of twelve working on a piece of ground a quarter of a chain square, and in this way they have skinned the ground. No Austrian diggers have settled here. The Austrians as a body are making money on the gumfield; one of them informed me that he was saving £2 a week. They are a very law-abiding and inoffensive class of men, but as matters stand now they are doing the Britishers harm by preventing them earning as much as they otherwise would do, as they take out in a week what the others take out in two or three weeks, and the money they earn is generally sent to their own country. The system of disposing of the gum seems to be badly regulated: some persons must make an enormous and unreasonable profit. I have sold gum, re-scraped, of the finest quality—light amber gum—for £4 15s., and the same quality was quoted in the London market at £10 and upwards. The profit, therefore, must have passed into the