

gum, because there is strong competition. The same obtains with regard to provisions. Free diggers can live from 14s. to 15s. a week, but to those that are already in debt to certain storekeepers it costs 18s. to £1. The prices of stores vary at the various places on the field from 13s. to £1 for the same goods. There is no reason for the difference in price. Most of the Austrians have served, excepting the very young ones; some have four to five years to serve, some three years. I heard that you were coming up, and so I made special inquiries.

WAIAPAKAURI.

Joseph Evans : I am a settler and publican, residing at Waipapakauri, and am a member of the Mongonui County Council. I am a gum-buyer of ten years' standing. I have only got fourteen diggers here, mostly settlers, besides a large number of Maoris. There are not any Austrians. I give the following instances of earnings from my books: James Baker earned six pounds' worth of gum for one week, and last week he earned £8 15s. He has a son fifteen years of age with him. Another settler, whose son helped him for two days, since Christmas earned £14 11s. These are exceptionally good earnings, as by the fine weather they have been able to get into the swamps. Another, who usually earns £1 a week, got £4 for the last three weeks. Another settler got £6 8s. 6d. for a little over a fortnight. Just at present poor classes of dark gum are realising high prices in comparison with the poor middle class. I think the average earnings are £2 10s. a week, including tucker. The average store bill would be from 12s. to 15s. a week. The prices of stores are as follows: Sugar, wholesale, about 13s. a bag—retail, 3½d. per pound, delivered on the field; flour, 8s. 6d. the 50 lb. bag, delivered on the field; tea, 2s. 4d. per pound, delivered; wax candles, 10d.; tobacco, 6s. 6d.; tinned meat, 13s. the dozen (2 lb.), 1s. 2d. per tin; fresh meat, 4d. per pound, never over that. I have not a field of my own. There is no Native land with gum on it; the gum is on Government land, and on some of the land held by private parties on various tenures from the Government. I hold that no gum-land should be disposed of. I believe it is a great mistake to dispose of any gum-land whatever. I have objected to the sales to Mr. Subritzki, and to the sales to Mr. Shine and others, and to storekeepers at Waiharaha. There are two storekeepers who have taken up land which I am satisfied they never intend to cultivate. Mr. Shine has not started charging yet, but I was informed that he intends the men who dig on it to deal with him. Mr. Shine, I understand, holds 1,100 acres—under what tenure I cannot say. I think that any man should be able to get 50 acres of land for a homestead along seaboard, although it is gum-land, provided that he makes certain improvements. Not all the diggers are spendthrifts, and I think that some of them will be willing not only to take up land, but to make the desired improvements. There should be a clause in the Act preventing any man from monopolizing 1,500 or 2,000 acres of land on the gumfields. I think a man who owns 300 acres should not be allowed to obtain any land on gumfields. I think a man who is allowed to take up gum-land should be permitted to dig the gum, as it will assist him in the perfecting of his homestead; but he should not be allowed to farm out the working of the gum on his land. I believe in settlement on the gumfields, but it should be hedged in by conditions in such a way as to prevent the monopoly in gum-digging. I have a son who can talk Austrian, and I have a thorough experience of them. Last winter I had 250 Austrians working for me at Te Kao. It is Maori land, and I gave the Natives £140 to put a store there. There is a large block of Native land—about 14,000 or 15,000 acres—mostly gum-land, which has formerly been worked by Molesworth and Sayes. I bought them out, and my arrangement with the Natives was that I paid them £40 per annum for the right of erecting a store, and also £7 5s. for each gum-digger I placed on the land, which was restricted to the number of fourteen. Last winter 250 Austrians paid the Natives £7 5s. for twelve months, half being paid down and the rest at intervals. I call them my men because they deal with me, but they are not bound either to sell their gum to me or to buy their provisions from me. My store is the only one there now. There are about fifty Austrians there now, and about ten or fifteen Britishers, and besides these there may be from a hundred to a hundred and fifty Maoris belonging to the place also working there. The Maoris also deal with me. There is adjoining Te Kao a tract of about ten miles in length of Crown land which is also gum-bearing. I have four stores on the gumfields—this one (Waipapakauri), one at Waiharaha, one at Hohoura, and one at Te Kao. I buy 100 lb. per month at Waipapakauri, 300 lb. a month at Waiharaha; I average about 500 lb. a month at Hohoura, and at Te Kao up to lately from 500 lb. to 600 lb. a month. At Waiharaha I may purchase from about a hundred men. I find the Austrians hardworking industrious people, but they take a lot of money away. They live pretty well: a few will be pretty mean, but they only average about 10 per cent. I believe they are impoverishing the country by sending money out of it. The only remedy I see is to put a heavy tax on them for digging gum. About seven months ago I had occasion to purchase gum from the Austrians at Te Kao. I paid them then about £600 in gold. Very soon after they remitted money to their Home-country which I believe amounted to £3,000. They went in my punt to meet the "Paeroa," going to Mongonui under the protection of several of their countrymen. Only two of the party went Home with the money. I have had thousands of pounds' worth of transactions with the Austrians, and have only been let in for 7s. I have not the same tale to tell of our own people. I think the gum trade has a good deal to answer for for the bad state of the roads in this district.

Peter Bowker : I am a Greek, and come from the confines of Austria. I came to Australia in 1884, and to New Zealand in 1895. I came to Wairoa first. I was a sailor, and came in a sailing-vessel. I heard that gum-digging was a better life than a sailor's, so I came here. I never heard that any came under contract—all came of their own free-will. I do not know that the Austrians are increasing in numbers, because many of them are coming and going. Some of them have to go on account of military service, and others to see their parents. I am a storekeeper, and buy gum. I am in partnership with Peter Sulenta, who joined me the