

work the bushes after forty years of age, most of them having no trade to fall back on. I think the land-laws at present are quite liberal enough for any one who really intends or wishes to take up land and settle. If in some popular form concise descriptions of the different methods of taking up land could be circulated amongst diggers, so as to make them understand "The Land Act, 1892," I am sure more would take advantage of that Act than now do.

John Edward Connolly : I am a storekeeper and gum-buyer at Kaeo. I have been five years in the district and two years gum-buying. The supply is falling off. That bought now is a mixture. The poorer quality would not have been bought years ago; it would not pay expenses. Diggers are producing unusually large quantities of gum, mostly swamp, just within the last few weeks. It is on account of the dry weather, and they are now getting gum where before it was considered inaccessible. I have not bought gum from Austrians, but a few sometimes come to me for stores. A British digger's tucker bill amounts to 8s. and 10s. a week. My opinion of the diggers about here is that they are hopelessly wanderers, and they would not settle; they travel from one field to the other; if they hear of a man getting more on another field they go there, and then perhaps return again the following week. Most of the men digging in this district are middle-aged men. I think I get a fair price for gum from the Auckland merchant; and there is hardly any loss in weight. I send my gum in bags. It is a trouble in the trade that the market prices are so fluctuating as regards the medium gum, but the better classes hold their own. Even if the Home market could be steadied for three months at a time it would be a great blessing. The good gum falls gradually, but the "black jack" and brown falls from £10 to £7 at a jump.

KAIKOHE, 12TH FEBRUARY, 1898.

Francis Patrick Green : I have been gum-digging, on and off, for eight years in this district, and am well acquainted with the industry. The quantity of gum is falling off considerably. First-class quality is still procurable, but in diminishing quantities. Any sort of gum can be sold at a price. Gum can be sold now which could not have been years ago. Eight years ago the price was £1 19s. a hundredweight, and a fair average man would get $1\frac{1}{4}$ cwt., earning £2 10s. a week. The same man could only get $\frac{3}{4}$ cwt. a week now, at £3 4s. to £3 5s. a hundredweight, which comes to about the same weekly wage. The men live fairly well. They cannot live under 12s. a week, and the prices of goods would be about the same as eight years ago. The improvement of the roads makes no difference in the price of provisions. We are digging now in the swamps, as it is dry weather. There are about sixty British diggers, of whom perhaps twelve are settlers, making their improvements by means of the gum. There are also about fifty Austrians. The Maoris in the district also bring in a great deal of gum. They do not dig regularly; several families go out together for a fortnight or three weeks, and work on the co-operative system. The principal fields here are owned by Maoris; but there are Government gum-lands, and Dickenson Brothers have private freeholds, and leaseholds from the Maoris. Maoris charge 2s. per hundredweight for gum as royalty. Mr. Dickenson's field, called "Waimamaku," leased from the Natives, was opened to the Austrians for a limited time, and they paid for the privilege of digging thereon at the rate of £1 per week, which was paid to the Maoris through Mr. Dickenson, Mr. Dickenson supplying these diggers with stores. Any digger going on to a private field is expected to sell his gum to and buy stores from the storekeeper to whom the lease of the land belongs. Even without an agreement this is agreed to; it is an unwritten law. On the Crown lands the digger is free. I have never heard anything of the truck system. The storekeepers get on very well with the diggers. I never heard anything against the Austrians. They are honest and straightforward, but the diggers say they are digging the country out of gum. The Austrians do not leave any ground unturned, and they earn all the gum they get. Austrians do not show any sign of settling; and all the money they earn is going out of the country, and the country gets nothing in return. They would make a very desirable class of settler. I have not heard of any means by which the digger or the industry could be improved. I am afraid you would not get any of the wandering class of diggers on any favourable terms to settle. They are too fond of an independent life. I have said that there were sixty British diggers on this field; I should think forty out of these were elderly men, and could not earn more than 20 lb. of gum a week, which means about 11s. in money. The best diggers have gone away, because they decline to work any longer on a field on which they could not make at least £1 a day: this refers particularly to the Pukekohe crowd, who were very good gum-diggers. These men worked on the face like the Austrians, and dug everything before them, and, I think, if such men were here now they would do well. There is plenty of gum on the fields about here. Of course, most of what was handy has been worked out, but what is left will last for years. Part of a field called the "Springs," which was supposed to be worked out years ago by Britishers, the Austrians last year went through again, and unearthed a very large amount of gum—to the best of my belief, about 18 tons. The same men (Austrians) are coming back to work it again. My experience is that the kauri-gum industry has not contributed in any way towards the construction of roads, but, on the contrary, has been the principal cause of destroying what roads were in the district. It is difficult to acquire any land near Kaitake, on account of the valuable land being, with few exceptions, in the hands of the Natives. If I saw my way to getting hold of a piece of really good land I should say I could hardly do better than put some of the money furnished by gum towards taking a piece of that land. I think if a settlement could be formed, in which good lands were offered to *bona-fide* diggers in order to settle, it would be good, and also to have a common reserve of gum-lands in the vicinity laid off, which should be for the use of those settlers alone, and not for the wandering