

There is a considerable quantity of this "corned beef" available at all the face-digging works, and it seems not improbable that before long the present waste product will be turned to profitable account, so adding another factor in the successful reclamation of these vast swamp areas.

BUSH AND BLED GUM.

In the early days of the industry—in fact, as soon as the fossil kauri became firmly established as a marketable commodity—attention was directed to the accumulations of gum known to exist in the extensive forests scattered over the North Auckland Peninsula. Strawn over the floor of these forests gum was found in large quantities mixed with the leaves, bark, and decayed wood and other vegetable matter just as it had fallen from the tree. At the base of some of the larger trees these accumulations had formed mounds several feet in height, and so the crop of bush gum was not only abundant, but was also easily gathered in.

No doubt it was the pioneer settler living on the fringe of the forests who first realized the value of bush gum. It did not, however, get a favourable reception on the Auckland market, where it brought only about one-third the price ruling for the harder "white range." There were times indeed when "bush" was quite unsaleable, but the prejudice against it steadily disappeared, it became sought after, and the price went up accordingly.

In the course of time this easily gathered crop began to be exhausted, and the attention of the gatherer was turned to the tree itself. Then the exploring and cleaning of the tree yielded an abundant harvest for many years. On many of the trees long yellow masses of resin resembling barley-sugar in appearance hung down from the limbs, while between the forks and on the barrels considerable quantities were found. On some of the giant trees so great were the deposits of gum that often they had to be dug out with a spade.

The men engaged in collecting the gum from the trees were known as "climbers," but their methods in the early days of the business were somewhat primitive. Usually two men worked together, one doing the actual climbing and the other remaining on the ground to gather up the gum as it was detached from the tree by his mate. For the purpose of making the ascent of the tree a weight attached to a strong fishing-line was thrown over a convenient limb; this done, a manila rope was attached to the line and hauled over the limb. The climber then worked his way up the rope, and by following the same method explored the whole of the tree. He usually carried a small tomahawk with which he chipped off the gum, which he allowed to fall to the ground. In the event of finding a large deposit in a fork or hollow he lowered his line and hauled up his spade. As time went on and the gum became scarcer more care was taken in saving it, and the gum as chipped off was placed in a bag and carefully lowered to the ground.

It can be easily imagined that the climber was not at all particular in his methods of chipping off the gum, and the consequence was that the trees were hacked and cut in a most indiscriminate manner. The climbers soon began to notice how freely the tree gave off its gum wherever a cut had been made, and it was not long after that the cutting or "bleeding" of the tree became a recognized practice of the climber. For many years bleeding was permitted both in the State and privately owned forests without restriction or control.

The earlier climbers were wont to classify the kauri into four classes, each with its particular bleeding characteristics. The first produced little or no gum. The second was known as the "dropper" tree, from the fact that the gum exuded from the branches and fell to the ground around the tree. The distinctive features of the dropper tree was that it had a prolific growth of branches; some of them had only short trunks, while others grew to a great height with a clear barrel of often 50 ft. to 100 ft. from the ground to the first branch. This tree was notable for producing the largest quantities of gum of the hardest and best qualities. The third class of tree was straight and tall but with comparatively few branches. It shed but little gum from the branches, the main flow taking place low down the barrel and at the roots. This tree was noticed to be subject to dry rot; the decay seemed to commence at the base of the tree and worked its way upwards. As soon as the decay started gum began to leak out, often in large quantities, hence this gum as known as "leak." In trees of the fourth class the gum was found in streaks on the barrel, somewhat resembling the grease on a candle which had been burning in a strong draught. "Candle" gum was found in various colours, from pure-white to light lemon, and from deep yellow to amber and dark brown.

The indiscriminate hacking and bleeding of the kauri above referred to continued for many years, and irreparable damage was done to the trees. When this began to be realized measures were taken to put an end to the practice as far as the State forests were concerned. In the absence of any control or proper system of bleeding the decision was a wise one. Bleeding was, however, continued on private lands, and of late years has been extensively practised with satisfactory and profitable results. Experience has proved that it is possible to conduct the bleeding operations in such a way as to do no appreciable damage to the tree. The men engaged in bleeding the trees are still known as "climbers," and have become exceedingly expert at the work.

The modern "climber" is equipped with a pair of 12 in. climbing-hooks; a pair of strong wooden clog boots, to the soles of which are affixed saw-teeth spikes and a strong spike projecting to the front; a 2½ lb. axe, and a manila rope 1¾ in. in circumference completes the outfit. The rope is generally from 180 ft. to 200 ft. long, and at one end is provided with a seat similar to a boatswain's loop. Having selected his tree the climber secures one end of his rope to his shoulder, firmly fixes his axe in his belt, and then with the aid of his climbing-hooks and spiked clogs quickly and skilfully mounts the tree. He reaches his first stopping-place, often over 100 ft. from the ground, in fifty or sixty seconds. Arrived there, he runs one end of his rope over an upper bough and pays out the rope until the "boatswain's loop" comes up to him. He then takes his seat and proceeds with the "tapping," working his way