

kauri timber which lies buried in these swamps in such vast quantities it has been ascertained that the kauri-gum can be extracted from a large proportion of the timber on an economic basis, while the peat itself is known to contain a valuable oil. So that every product of these peat swamps can be turned to account, and all that is necessary to achieve these results is the adoption of scientific and up-to-date methods of handling the various problems.

In regard to these kauri-peat areas and their proper utilization it is important there should be a detailed geological survey made of them. I am fully satisfied that in no part of the Dominion could the services of a portion of the Geological Survey staff be more advantageously employed than in making this survey. And I can say this advisedly, for I was a member of that staff for the three years 1905–8 during the time Dr. J. Macintosh Bell was Director.

THE AUSTRIAN AND THE GOVERNMENT GUM LANDS.

A matter deserving of most careful consideration is the question of allowing the Austrian gum-diggers, many of whom have now been drafted to public works in various parts of the North Island, to return to the gumfields. I am firmly of opinion that these men should be altogether excluded from the Government gum lands, and the lands retained for the digger of British birth and for the Maori people. This was the original intention of the Legislature when the Kauri-gum Industry Act was passed, and the large reservations of gum land were made for the purpose of giving effect to that intention. Since the first influx in about the year 1896 these men, who have lately been referred to as Jugo-Slavs, have had the unrestricted run of the gumfields. By one means and another, especially by an easy procurement of naturalization referred to later, in the past they seem to have had little difficulty in evading the pronounced intention of Parliament. I think the present is an opportune time to go back to the original idea and retain the lands for British subjects by birth and for the Maori, and I strongly urge that this course be adopted.

I have been informed from time to time that certain of the Justices of the Peace before whom these Austrians appeared when applying for naturalization were very free-and-easy in their methods. It is common talk in the North that the fee charged was from £5 to £7 10s. a head, and it mattered little whether the candidate for naturalization had been only a few days in New Zealand or whether he could speak a word of English—as long as he could pay the fee he was put through. I do not think this is at all an exaggerated account of the state of affairs which has prevailed on the gumfields in regard to the granting to the men referred to the privilege of becoming a British subject. It is highly desirable that measures should be taken which will prevent a recurrence of such practices.

In any case, when the question of these Austrians being allowed to return to the gumfields, and of those still on the gumfields being allowed to remain there, comes up for consideration, the fact that many of them have been permitted to become naturalized British subjects should not carry much weight.

SERIOUS DAMAGE TO THE GUM LANDS BY FIRES.

At various times I have called attention to the very serious damage to the gum lands by the indiscriminate lighting of fires by gum-diggers and others. So far no effective measures have been taken to grapple with the question. I cannot too strongly urge that prompt action be taken at once to prevent the serious damage being continued. An expenditure of £500 a year would suffice, and I suggest that this is a small insurance fee to pay for the safeguarding of such a valuable portion of the public estate.

DREDGING FOR KAURI-GUM.

During the last four years persistent efforts have been made by private enterprise to utilize the dredge in the winning of kauri-gum from the peat swamps of the North. Within the past year a company, with which Mr. F. V. Raymond was associated, was formed with the object of engaging actively in gum-dredging. Almost at the inception of the enterprise a serious loss was suffered by the company in the almost total destruction of the plant by fire. Undismayed by this check the company set to work to repair the damage, but owing to the adverse conditions prevailing in the iron trade, and the difficulty of obtaining suitable labour, progress has been much retarded. Although not a great quantity of gum has been recovered up to the present, the results show that the company is on the right track, and offer encouragement to proceed with the enterprise, I hope, to a thoroughly successful issue. Up to the present the expenditure on dredging for gum at Awanui, where the works are in progress, amounts to about £10,000.

PLANTATION OF FLAX AT THE BIG FLAT, WAIHARARA.

The suitability of the kauri-peat swamp lands of the North for growing flax (*Phormium tenax*) was frequently discussed during the inspection of the lands by the Kauri-gum Commission early in 1914. Later on reference has been made to the growth of flax on the face-digging areas as a result of the drainage work. Towards the end of last year a trial plantation of about half an acre was made at the Big Flat. Although the planting was done very late in the year—in December—and although after the planting there was a spell of two weeks' dry weather, the plants did very well. Six hundred plants were put in, and there were only eighteen which did not take.

This year an area of over 50 acres was planted. The plants were put in 6 ft. apart with a 12 ft. space every twelfth row. The plants have taken well, and the plantation promises to be very successful.