

of low and ruinous prices again, as in 1894. These considerations, we respectfully submit, are another powerful argument for the imposition of an export duty, for the purpose of compensating the North to some extent for the great losses suffered in the past through the gum industry, and for enabling the different counties to construct the much-needed roads.

14. Many of the settlers have brought under your Commissioners' notice the desirability of reserving special blocks of gum-land for the exclusive use of the settlers in their several districts. While realising the desirability of making some of the reserves thus specifically applied for, in order to insure to the genuine settlers gum-lands conveniently situated, and so give them the opportunity of earning some money for the further improvement of their holdings, we consider that the carrying out of the project is beset with many difficulties. The surveys of these blocks would involve a very heavy and perhaps a practically useless expenditure. Many of the settlers, there is reason to believe, prefer to be at liberty to dig gum where they please. These special reservations, moreover, would be a source of dispute and strife, and would require continuous supervision to prevent trespass. Your Commissioners, therefore, do not see their way to recommend that such special blocks of gum-lands be reserved for particular sections of the community.

15. An indirect result of the kauri-gum industry has been to a certain extent to diminish the resourcefulness of settlers themselves. In other parts of the colony a farmer has to rely upon the proceeds of his farming industry for his sole subsistence and that of his family, but in the North the knowledge that a few pounds can always be obtained by gum-digging prevents some of the settlers from obtaining all the benefit that could be wrested from the tillage of the soil. Nor has the northern settler gained greatly by being able to furnish supplies to the large number of gum-diggers around him. The food supplied by storekeepers to diggers is in most cases imported from abroad—tinned meats, tinned milk, tinned butter, tinned fish, tinned fruit, &c., being the staples of consumption, not only in the diggers' tents, but in the accommodation-houses also of the far North.

16. The men known as Austrians on the gumfields are visitors from Lower Austria. They are mostly natives of Dalmatia, but some are from Istria and Croatia, a few also being from the Balkan States, Montenegrins, Bulgarians, &c. They are a hardy, sober, industrious, law-abiding people. This character is given to them with one consent by all the witnesses, whether storekeepers, settlers, or British gum-diggers. In their own country they were mainly agriculturists, engaged at work in the vineyards, olive groves, &c.; but some are fishermen from the islands in the Adriatic. Many of them are very young men, and it is asserted that their desire to escape military service prompted emigration. Very few of them have wives or children in this country, but many of the older men have families in Europe. Those who have already put in part of their time at military service have every now and then to report themselves and get their passports *visèd* by the Austrian Consul in Auckland; but the younger men do not attend at the Consulate for this purpose, and hence there is no check upon the number arriving or leaving the colony. They speak a Slavonic dialect, not German. The older men are not educated, but the younger men can all read and write, under the excellent system of education that now obtains in Austria. They appear to have strong family affections, much of the money sent home being for the purpose of aiding brothers and other male relatives to come out here also, or for the purpose of helping their families at home. They appear to have been attracted to this country by accounts sent from New Zealand some years ago by two sailors, but still more recently by the return of some lucky Austrian gum-diggers, who took home some £9,000 drawn in one of Tattersall's racing sweeps. They began to appear on the gumfields in great numbers, and we consider that there are between fifteen hundred and sixteen hundred now in New Zealand, but they are so widely scattered, and their numbers are so constantly changing locally, that it is difficult to give the exact enumeration. It is said that there has been failure of the fruit crop, and general scarcity, of late years in Dalmatia, and, if so, it would account for the necessity of many leaving home in search of work; but as most of the men earned previously, on an average, only 1s. 2d. a day, it is easy to understand that the country in which some of them are gaining from £3 to £5 a week would have sufficient attractions, without even the spur of hunger behind them.

17. They generally camp together in twenties or thirties, digging in the swamps in summer and on the hills in winter. They work very long hours, often being in the field awaiting the first light of dawn to commence their labour, and ending only when darkness compels them to desist. The evenings and part of the night they spend in scraping the gum.