

for the protection of the digger, but to prevent the possibility of false charges being brought against the honest buyer of gum.

25. The trade in kauri-gum practically commenced in 1847, and its price continued from that date up to 1853 to be about £5 per ton. After the year 1853 the fluctuations, both in value and tonnage, of the gum were of an interesting character, and these can be best seen in a comparative form by reference to the table printed herewith in the Appendix. It will be noticed, on consulting this table, that the quantity of gum exported increased from 1,440 tons in 1856 to 8,271 tons in 1893, and since that date has diminished to 6,540 tons in 1897. The price has, however, steadily risen, till it now stands at the highest figure it has ever attained—that is, at from £61 to £70. Much less gum is now obtained by the individual digger than was formerly the case, some witnesses considering it as fully one-half, others one-third less. The steadily rising price enables a living to be obtained, even with the lesser quantity procured, and this increasing price justifies the idea that the rise in kauri-gum is not only because of the demand caused by the world's larger population, but also on account of the industrial virtues of the gum making it recognised as an indispensable ingredient in the manufacture of good varnish. It is true that there are other competitors with kauri-gum in the market; of these, the principal is that called Manilla, the Zanzibar and other African gums not being produced in sufficient quantity to offer effective rivalry. On this subject we will quote from the report of the former Commission the remarks made by Mr. Ingham Clarke, F.L.S., F.R.G.S., an eminent London varnish-maker. He says:—

The total annual imports of varnish gums into England, a part of which is re-exported, amount to about 4,000 tons, nearly two-thirds being represented by the kauri-gum of New Zealand. About 400 tons came from our West African colony of Sierra Leone, 400 or 500 tons from the Philippine and adjacent islands (usually known as Manilla gum), and the remainder from various parts of the world. The “gum animé” exported from Zanzibar, is a high-class gum, but very limited in quantity, and is worth, in London, from £200 to £350 per ton. Manilla gums are so like the kauri-gum in appearance that it is almost impossible at sight to distinguish them, the greatest adepts being able to do so by the sense of smell only. The Manilla gums have all some tricky characteristic, which causes trouble to manufacturers even months after the varnishes are made. Some qualities are used in the manufacture of certain grades of ordinary varnishes. Others are unfit for use in the manufacture of oil-varnishes. The Damar gums are unsuitable for oil-varnishes, being only employed in the manufacture of spirit-varnishes, and do not come at all into competition with kauri-gum. Kauri-gum commands a supremacy in the market. There is, however, a shadow to this pleasant picture, for the excessive production, stimulated by the ever-increasing demand, is, without doubt, rapidly exhausting the known sources of supply. If it were not akin to heresy in these days to make such a proposition, one would be inclined to suggest that the New Zealand colonists should place an export tax on gum. No other gum could take its place, from a peculiarity which it possesses (entirely its own) of assimilating with oil more rapidly and at an easier temperature than any other gum. The Manilla gums, it is true, enter largely into competition with kauri; but, as we have already stated, they are treacherous in use, and mostly contain strong acids and other objectionable substances, thereby upsetting all theory and practice, and resulting often in injury to the manufactured article, and subsequent regret to those who use them. Kauri-gum is extensively employed by the leading manufacturers in every country where varnish is made. This universal favour we by no means attribute to the superior results to be obtained by its use, but rather to the fact that it is easier to manipulate—that is, it unites with linseed-oil quicker, and at a lower temperature, than any other gum. It is probable that the essential oil it contains acts in the fusing process as a solvent; hence, less heat being necessary, carbonisation is minimised, and a relatively paler varnish is the product.

The New Zealand gum-merchants seem to hold up the competitive powers of Manilla and other gums as a scarecrow, to prevent an export duty being applied to kauri-gum, urging that if such duty be imposed the other gums would be preferred, and the kauri-gum trade ruined. The fallacy of this reasoning has been fully exposed during the last few years, as the £3 export duty recommended by the previous Commission in 1893 would have only brought its then price up to £51 for the lowest grade quoted in the table, while in 1897 £61 is quoted as the market price of the lowest quality, thus showing that the non-imposition of the duty has caused a loss to the colony as follows:—

1893: At, say, £3 per ton duty ...	...	...	8,271 tons =	£ 24,813
1894 " ... ...	...	...	8,069 "	24,207
1895 " ... ...	...	...	7,198 "	21,594
1896 " ... ...	...	...	7,011 "	21,033
1897 " ... ...	...	...	6,450 "	19,350

£110,997

We may strengthen this view of the subject by calling attention to the demand for even the poorer qualities of kauri-gum. Swamp-gum, black jack, sugary gum, and other poor varieties are firmly placed in the market; even the dust and scrapings, formerly not worth