

not paid their license-fees is that they are dissatisfied. They have no voice in local affairs, and have only the vote under manhood suffrage. There are a great many diggers becoming a tax on charitable aid. Several of us have thought that if a portion of these fees was put by as a fund to meet these cases it would relieve the county. The average earnings of a thoroughly able-bodied man I consider to be £1 4s. or £1 5s. a week, but the general average would be much lower, as many of them are aged and infirm. Gum is becoming scarcer, and men are working longer hours; they work from daylight to dark at the different branches of their work. I know of a few men who are engaged hooking gum in the swamps who are averaging from £3 to £4, but are exceptionally good men, and working sixteen hours a day, and these are not to be considered the average any more than the aged and infirm, who are only getting 20 lb. of gum a week. They are working at the dry parts of the swamps just now. I am quite positive that there are now five Austrians to every one on the fields in 1893, and the British digger has decreased proportionately. I have nothing against the Austrians personally, but their industry and energy does not benefit this colony at all. It benefits Austria. If they settled here the matter would be very different. In speaking to a considerable number of them I have never heard one say he was going to settle in the colony. I have made it a special object on my part to find out what their intentions are as to settling in the colony. The settlers are suffering from these Austrians, as there is not half the sale of their produce to the Austrian digger as there is to the Britisher. I think a license should be annually issued to British subjects and to foreigners that have been twelve months in the colony, signing a declaration to that effect with the usual penalties, and that it should be illegal for storekeepers to buy gum from diggers except on the production of the annual license. I think it would benefit the gum-digger by steadying the output of gum, and be as fair for the private leaseholder as for the Government in regard to its gum-lands. I think, also, that all the persons engaged in this industry would benefit by this. Previous to last Commission there were a number of young men on the field who intended to settle on the land if they could earn enough to give them a start. Government would be justified in reserving gum-land for settlers that have taken up land in the vicinity. Good land, as a rule, contains no gum. I do not believe in the disposal of gum-land in any shape or form. I have no personal experience of the truck system. I should very much like to know what amount of money is annually sent away to Austria from this country through the Post Office or banks, as it would give the information. I think, at the lowest estimate, on an average, the Austrian digger saves 10s. a week, which is sent to Austria. If these men were engaged on bushfelling or reproductive work, on wages, and then left the colony with their savings, we would have something to show as the result of their labour while in the colony, but as it is there is nothing to show for it; the gum is gone, and the money and the men with it; and the land is ruined. The diggers were thoroughly disheartened, after waiting for four or five years, finding that no remedy whatever has been applied by Government to do away with the many substantial complaints constantly brought under their notice. Many of our most active men of the union gave up agitating any further, and I feel convinced if such a state of things had existed in any of the southern districts a remedy would have been devised long ago.

The evidence of William Fitzpatrick, of Dargaville, given before the Gum Commission in 1893, is as follows: I am a gum-digger on Mr. Harding's Aoroa Block. I have been deputed to come before the Commission by a public meeting of gum-diggers held two or three weeks ago at Burns's Camp on the same block. The first point has reference to the alien question. A resolution was passed at the meeting that it was very unfair to the permanent diggers, who are colonists and intending to remain here, that the gum should be dug and the money taken out of the country by a crowd of aliens. It was proposed by way of remedy that every person digging gum should obtain a license to do so, whether on public or private lands, and that the persons entitled should be British-born subjects, or persons naturalised only after two years' residence in the country. It was generally thought that 10s. per annum would be a sufficient fee for the license. There was also a resolution passed condemning what is called on the gumfields the "truck system"—*i.e.*, when the digger is obliged to deal with a particular store, and gets for his gum just what the storekeeper chooses to pay him for it. The diggers think the right system is to pay a royalty, as on Mr. Harding's land, and let the digger take his gum where he likes. I am married, and would like to earn enough to settle on the land; and there are many others who wish the same. To do this will be difficult or impossible, now the gum is getting scarce, if more than a certain number of men come on the field. I am a native of New Zealand. I do not think the Austrians mean to settle, but some might do so if the license system were put in force. I believe they are honest and industrious. I consider the average earnings of the diggers, taking the year through, are not more than £1 4s. or £1 5s. per week. The very high earnings are mostly got by men of unusual strength and endurance, who can work in difficult or wet ground. I think the earnings here are a little better than those nearer Auckland. The average number of hours worked on the ground might be seven, besides several more for scraping the gum and cooking. I think the general opinion of the diggers is against an export duty, and they think the license system would meet the case. Their grievance is the influx of foreigners. The gum is now much more difficult to get, and a man who has been here fourteen years tells me it is now as hard to get 10 lb. as it was to get $\frac{1}{2}$ cwt. ten years ago. There are many aged persons who now just make a living on the gumfields, whereas most of the foreigners who come are able-bodied men. I am told by those who have been here longer than myself that the number of foreigners is increasing every year, and I notice that there are more than there were two years ago. There may have been thirty or forty men at our meeting, but many of them were sent as representatives of different localities. The meeting may have represented a hundred men. There is no ill-feeling against the foreigners, and they have not been molested or insulted in any way. [The diggers present were asked if they assented generally to what this witness had said, and it was stated that they did so. One man considered Mr. Fitzpatrick's estimate of wages too high.]