

## VALE OF AVOCA, 24TH JANUARY, 1898.

*Peter Langton* : I am a settler and storekeeper in the Vale of Avoca, and Ranger for the Kauri Timber Company for one hundred miles. I have found that the only honest men in New Zealand are the foreigners, not one of whom has gone away owing me a penny. Look at my books, and you will see that all the others have a balance on the wrong side. The British gum-digger is always scheming how he can get the better of me. I issue the gum-licenses over the above-mentioned area; the fee is 10s. for the right to dig gum. The licensees can sell the gum where they like, and buy their provisions where they like. The only conditions attached to the licenses (Kauri Timber Company) is with regard to the putting-out of fires and the non-interference with rights or cultivated grass lands. There are twenty or thirty Austrians at work here. The Austrians live quite as well as, if not better than, the British gum-digger. Their average living costs 12s. a week, including tobacco. Their average earnings are £1 5s. a week, not clear of tucker. I never heard that the Austrians come out here under contract; in fact, I am sure they do not. I have advanced money to some of them to enable their friends to come out. [Passages were read from the store-books which showed that the Austrians have as many goods and as great a variety of articles of food as the ordinary British gum-digger.] My way of proposing to settle the difficulty is to endeavour to settle the Austrians on the land, as they will be found to be the best of settlers. I consider that gum-diggers obtaining 5 lb. and 6 lb. nowadays, with present prices of provisions, are better off than the digger was when they obtained 1 cwt. of gum a day, which was twenty years ago.

*Mark Ciprian* : I was born in Dalmatia. I am a labourer. The wages in that country were about 2s. and found. I first heard of New Zealand from people talking about it. I came direct in a steamer from Trieste, to Scarrott's, on the Wairoa. I have been here five years, and could only make tucker when I came first. I am not married. I made £30 gum-digging, and then, with the assistance of Mr. Peter Langton, took up land in Maunguru Survey District. If Government found good land for the Austrians I am sure some of my countrymen would settle on it. The land is too wet near the river (Wairoa) for vine-growing. The Maunguru would make a grand vineyard country, and Austrians, if they had the opportunity, would settle, and introduce the wine industry. The Government should translate the land-laws into Slavonic, which would be the means of making my countrymen acquainted with the facilities of settling. A great many of my countrymen are married men with families, and they send their savings home to keep them. Their earnings in the summer time would be £1 5s. a week and tucker, and in the winter 10s.

## WAIROA BRIDGE, 25TH JANUARY, 1898.

*Jefery Hunter* : I am a gum-buyer at Maungakahia. I have been here twenty years. I never had any Austrians working for me. I discourage them. The adjoining land to mine is Maori land, which the Maoris work themselves, and do not want anybody else. There is only one white man working under license there. I do not hold any leased gum-lands. There are not so many gum-diggers now as some time ago, and they are getting better prices now. The quantity and quality of the gum has fallen off. I should think that it costs 10s. to 12s. for the ordinary British gum-digger's keep. The diggers complain of the Austrian competition, but the storekeepers are quite satisfied with them.

*Samuel Lucas* : Seven years ago I went to Australia, and stayed there five months, and then came to New Zealand. I went to Tikinui, and made sometimes £1, and sometimes 10s., and sometimes tucker. There are seventeen Austrians in this camp, and all come from Dalmatia, except one Italian. We are only making tucker. I paid my own passage from Austria. My brother told me to come to New Zealand. All the Austrians paid their own passages. No storekeeper ever paid passages. I do not know anything about the land-laws of the colony. I have not completed my military service. Three here have been soldiers, and two are married men.

[Samuel Lucas was to have acted as interpreter, but he laboured under great difficulties in making translations, and the men at this camp were very unwilling even to give their names, they apparently having conceived that the Commission intended some harm to them. They had an idea that the Commissioners, being Government officers, were in some manner obtaining information concerning them for the Austrian Government, probably as to their military service.]

*Samuel Rawnsley* : I am a gum merchant and storekeeper at Poroti. I have been here eighteen years. I generally approve of what I said before the Gum Commission of 1893, excepting so far as the portion with reference to the price of goods. There is very little difference in the way the Austrians live and the Britishers. When they first came here they lived very poorly, but now they live as well as the British gum-diggers. They are sober and industrious, and I have never lost a penny by them, and have had extensive transactions with them. I have had a hundred and fifty dealing with me. We make a considerable reduction for cash—12 per cent. and 12½ per cent. The Austrians prefer paying cash. We have very few accounts now, through this system, of either British or Austrians. I produce a cash-book, in which you will see an average account shows that two Austrians during a recent month paid for 2 cwt. flour, 2 cwt. potatoes, tin of coffee, half-tin pepper, four tins lard, one case tinned meat, half-dozen packets of matches, and bag of sugar (4 lb.): total, £5 0s. 4d.; average, about 10s. per week. Two Britishers took a week's supplies—50 lb. flour, 1 lb. butter, 4 lb. sugar, 4 lb. rice, 2 lb. honey, ½ lb. tea, one tin of meat, two sticks of tobacco, two packets matches, and 1 lb. candles—amounting to £1, but fresh meat extra: average, about 10s. a week. The way in which some of the Austrians have come out is that the passage-money is raised on the security of their relations, which they are