

is free to any one who chooses to dig gum, I do not see why the Austrians should not have the same right to dig gum as any one else, according to the law of the country; in fact, it would be an injustice to make an exception with them. Most of those at Mangawhai are late arrivals from Austria. The Austrians are so thick on some of the fields that they cannot make a living themselves. There is a possibility that some of the older diggers may be crowded out, and not be able to make a living; they may have to mortgage their places at Home to get back to their families, and if they have no private land at Home to mortgage they will be in a difficult position. As far as I know, none of my countrymen have brought their families out, and those that are married have been married in this country. I think it would be safe to say that more than five-sixths of the Austrians out here are young men, strong and active, and ready for military service if required. I think the wages in Austria for an ordinary labourer is about 1s. 8d. in good silver, per day, the labourer finding himself. A stonemason gets 2s. and upwards. The Austrians, if they can help it, will not stint themselves in the necessaries of life; in fact, many of them live better than the other gum-diggers when they have the money to pay their way. It is nonsense to talk about them starving themselves when you consider the long hours and hard work connected with gum-digging. Most of them are Roman Catholics, but a few of them may be of the Greek Church. Those that are Catholics keep all the saints' days, so far as they know.

RUAKAKA SWAMP.

Neil James Campbell: I am a gum-buyer, and resident in Ruakaka. I have been here forty-one years, and a storekeeper for the last fourteen years. I buy gum from diggers in this field (Ruakaka). At present they are mostly Austrians. They are decent, honest, fine fellows, the best I have dealt with in gum. At first the Austrians live in a poor way, but after a few years they live better than the ordinary Britishers. I will quote from my store-books a few of the average savings for a week: £1 12s., £2 2s. 6d., £2 7s. 6d., £1 1s. 6d., £1 5s., and £1 6s. This is clear of tucker. Their average tucker bill comes to 12s. or 14s. Flats like Ruakaka will not be worked out for twenty years to come, as the gum is in layers. All the diggers have to work on the face, and together. I never heard that they came out under contract. For instance, I know of three brothers who came out on the advice of a brother who was here. I hold a lease of 550 acres of gum-land. Each digger pays a royalty of 12s. for the season. Of course they are free to buy stores and sell gum to whom they like. Austrians always look out for the better class of gum; when they happen to open up ground where gum is sugary they leave at once. There are a great many of the Austrians on this field who have been working here for four and five years. In winter time they scatter through the district, but return again during summer time. The Ruakaka Swamp is a favourite field, and in order not to have it overcrowded I gave notice in the paper that I would not have any more than the limited number I formerly agreed to have. I am now full, having seventy at work here. There are ten Britishers, sixteen Maoris, and forty-four Austrians. One ground for complaint that the Britisher has is that he does not get "starts" now from the storekeeper, as in former times. I find that the longer the Austrians are here the less they save, gradually drifting into the ways of the colonials. The younger men tell me that when the gum is done they will never go home to their own country. It is impossible for me to say what profit the merchants make out of the gum purchased from me, as they re-sort it, but two years ago the Auckland merchants made a loss. I think, if it were possible in some measure to regulate the sale of gum in New York and London, so that these constant fluctuations should not harass the market, it would be better for all concerned—the producers, the gum-buyers, and the merchants.

HUKERENUI, 31st JANUARY, 1898.

John Gray: I am a settler since 1869, and am well acquainted with the gum industry in this district. I hold the land under village-settlement regulations. I consider the settlers have a grievance against the coming of the Austrians. There were two hundred Austrians on the field the winter before last; they left when the ground got hard. There are very few now. We do not want them, because of their competition, considering that I and the other settlers took up land here with the view of the Government assisting us. The settlers could not have taken up the land without the assistance of the gum. When Mr. Ballance was Minister of Lands I was one of a deputation that waited on him. He asked how the settlers got on. We told him that the settlers had a bank at their doors in the shape of the kauri-gum field, and as long as that lasted we would make a living. He asked if it was not possible to set aside gum-land for the settlers. At the time there were not many settlers, and we did not advise it. He said, "If you will say the word I will conserve this gumfield as a common for the use of the settlers residing on the land." We made no reply. He said, "At any time you can make the matter plain to me. I will set it aside as long as I am in the Ministry." He would have to propose fresh legislation to make the reservation. We never made application to have it reserved. Gum-diggers have always had the right to dig here. No license-fee was ever charged on the Crown land, but there is in the Puhipuhi; a license of 10s. is charged. A digger on Native land, leased from the Maoris, has to pay £1 for twelve months to the lessee, and in addition has to sell his gum and buy stores from him; and in the event of not doing so the men have to leave the field. There is no written or printed agreement. A man working on Wilson's field sold his gum to somebody else, but Wilson, not having a written agreement, did not proceed against him. Verbal agreements are very seldom broken. We have petitioned Parliament to set aside certain blocks of gum-land for the settlers. We do not object to the Austrians personally, but we shall have to leave the land. There is no prospect for our sons and families to take up land. As for the *bonâ fide* digger and old men, it is throwing them