

Previously it has been thought almost impossible to go past the middlemen abroad, especially in London, and make any great progress. Apparently the shareholders in this company think otherwise. They certainly have the good wishes of the producers and those depending on them for a livelihood in the gum-digging areas. If this company can establish direct relations with the users abroad and make good, it will possibly open the way for large companies working chip areas, and may result in inestimable value to the country at large.

GUM-WASHING COMPANIES AND LARGE-SCALE PRODUCTION.

Quite a number of companies and syndicates have been formed during the past few years to work gum-bearing areas, principally "chip" fields, on a large scale. Few gum-diggers, and scarcely any dealers or exporters in the City of Auckland, took part in the formation of these ventures, owners of gum-bearing land and speculators comprising the most prominent shareholders. So far no great success has been achieved. Some of the largest companies have dropped out altogether; those that are still in existence play but a small part in the production of saleable gum.

A great deal of pioneer work has been done by these companies, and many types of machines have been evolved and tried out to deal with the gum-bearing soil and separate the gum from the earth and other foreign matter. They are mostly screens of varying size, and placed in different positions in all shapes, sizes, and classes of tubs and cylinders, with a variety of means of agitating the soils when passing over the sieves. In theory the earth crushes up and passes through the sieving with the water. The difficulty is that much of the earth and the "mud-balls" formed by the rotary movement of the plants is too large to pass through the sieving and is far harder than the gum. To break up this foreign matter would mean breaking up most of the gum. So far no plant has attained any general use, and it is very questionable if any great improvement has been made on the digger's hand-tub, except that a greater quantity of material can be put through at a time.

Although the companies are able to wash, clean, and grade gum much cheaper than the digger, the latter seems to have such an advantage in the digging of the soil and the delivering of the material into the tub that he is more than able to hold his own. The chief endeavour of companies has been to work up washing and cleaning plants—the digging and handling, which constitutes the chief cost of production, being mostly done with the spade in the same fashion as the single-handed digger works. Under present methods of "rubbling" the small parties of diggers can clean and grade the yield in about one-fourth the time it takes to dig and pass through the washing-tub. Much of the cleaning is done in broken time and on Sundays, and it is obvious that hired men will not work such long hours or so hard as a digger on his own account, especially when prices are high and the demand good. The digger has also an advantage inasmuch as he can dig on Government reserves on the payment of an annual license fee of 5s., whereas a company must purchase or lease freehold land.

Apart from the question of production, the companies have also found difficulty in disposing of their yield. They invariably attempted to produce a better chip than the market demanded, and there was an undue disposition, for a commencement at any rate, to try and do business direct with the dealer or user abroad. Unless low-grade kauri-gum is sold on a guaranteed gum content, and some standards established, the larger producers will probably always experience difficulty in making sales fit in with production.

Until better mechanical methods are devised that will enable the digging and conveying of the gum-bearing soil to the washing plant at a much lower cost than digging by hand, large-scale production of cheap chip gradings is exceedingly unlikely.

THE LATE REGINALD PALMER GREVILLE.

It is with extreme regret I have to record the death of the late Mr. Greville, which took place on the 6th September, 1923. He had served in the Lands and Survey and Geological Departments for many years, and was appointed Chairman of the Royal Commission which was set up in 1914 to inspect and classify the Government kauri-gum reserves. A great deal of administrative work was necessary in the way of giving effect to the findings of the Commission and opening up for settlement the land from which the reservation had been uplifted. This was entrusted to Mr. Greville. Before it was completed the war broke out and the bottom fell out of the kauri-gum trade. Immediate action had to be taken by the Government to protect the gum-diggers from serious want caused by a lack of sales. The result was the setting-up of the Kauri-gum Branch of the Lands and Survey Department, Mr. Greville being placed in charge as Kauri-gum Superintendent, which position he held until the time of his death. In addition to being a licensed surveyor, Mr. Greville was also a fully qualified solicitor and a land-valuer of high standing.

Although there was at one time some objection to the Kauri-gum Branch by a certain section of the trading community, it is pleasing to record that this feeling has almost entirely disappeared, and harmonious relations prevail at the present time. Much of the credit for this must be given to the late Mr. Greville, a far-seeing man of affairs, conscientious to a degree in the carrying-out of his official duties, and of the utmost integrity. When the Royal Commission of 1921 was set up to inquire into the kauri-gum industry generally, and particularly into the burning questions as to the advisability of instituting an export tax and standard gradings of gum, Mr. Greville, although the head of an export business, was selected Chairman with the unanimous consent of the whole industry.

Owing to Mr. Greville's illness and subsequent death the control for a considerable period of 1923-24 was practically in the hands of Mr. G. Anderson, and the thanks of the Department are due to him for the energetic, loyal, and businesslike way he carried on.

The Under-Secretary for Lands.

H. J. LOWE,
Kauri-gum Superintendent.