

authority to expend any money, which may have been voted for their public works, until near, or after, the expiration of the financial year on the 31st March. If the contract for the work is very long delayed the vote lapses, and so the local bodies are obliged to spend their money at a time when it cannot be spent to good purpose, unless they adopt the clumsy and unsatisfactory device which has been suggested as their only alternative, which is to insert in the contract a condition that the work is not to be begun until the spring.

We think it beyond question that no consideration of departmental convenience, and no regard for the symmetry of balance-sheets, ought to cause money thus to be wasted, and the welfare of the settlers to be disregarded, but that arrangements should be made by which it should become possible for the road-work always to be done in the summer.

In all that has been said about the various suggestions which have been made for raising funds for the roads, it has been on all sides understood that nothing of the kind should be done unless the money so raised be faithfully devoted to the object designed. But one exception to this rule has been recommended, and we think the recommendation rests upon valid reasons. It is proposed that of whatever revenue may be raised, a certain small proportion should be set apart for the relief of those diggers who, in due course, from age, if from no other cause, must sooner or later come on the Charitable Aid funds, as well as those who, by sickness or accident, may be reduced to the same necessity. By some such provident arrangement as this a future heavy drain upon the resources of the Charitable Aid Board may be alleviated or prevented.

Another suggestion which we have received is that, since the cartage of kauri-timber has had a considerable share in cutting up the roads, a certain proportion—say 10 per cent.—of the proceeds of the Government kauri-timber sales should be devoted to the maintenance of roads. We are content with recording this proposition as one which we regard as not unreasonable.

We now bring to a close our general remarks upon the very large subject submitted to our consideration, and in doing so we must express our sense of the impossibility of exhausting within any reasonable time the multitudinous questions that might easily be raised within the limits of our commission. To become fully acquainted with the merits of all the questions that arise in different centres of the gum industry would require a protracted stay in a number of those centres, and a complete understanding of many matters could never be obtained by any formal taking of evidence, nor even by the few general conversations with persons of different classes which the limited time at our disposal has permitted us to hold. But though we have crowded a great deal of work into our time, and have extended that time beyond the apparent expectations of some who are interested in the conclusions at which we may arrive, we have yet been obliged to omit some places which we had fully intended and much desired to visit. But we have done as much as we could; and we believe that we have been able to place under your Excellency's notice the leading questions which concern the welfare of the population connected with the gum industry.

If it should prove to be possible, without injury to any class or interest, to make the kauri-gum contribute to the permanent advancement of the country, it must be matter for regret that steps in that direction were not sooner taken, for no traveller in the north can fail to be struck with the inadequate results in the way of settlement and cultivation, of roads and bridges, which have followed so many years of an industry which has in that time obtained from the ground £6,000,000 worth of the commodity with which it has been concerned.

We now proceed to answer categorically, so far as we can, the questions put to us, and to state more succinctly and definitely the conclusions to which we have come. The questions referred to are as follows:—

(1.) The number of persons engaged in gum-digging, and the proportionate nationalities of the same, including Maoris.

(2.) The truth or otherwise of statements that have been made, to the effect that persons of alien races are about to come to the said gumfields in large numbers.

(3.) The average earnings of men digging for kauri-gum on the said gumfields.

(4.) The proportion of such men working under contract, and the proportion working free from contract.

(5.) To what extent the contract-system obtains as between the gum-diggers and the store-keepers who purchase the gum.

(6.) The methods of payment most in use on the said fields, and the prevalence of the truck-system.

(7.) The fees paid to the Crown for digging gum, or the right to dig gum on such fields; and

(8.) To advise generally as to the system of working the said gumfields best fitted to preserve the interests of the Crown, and at the same time to promote the kauri-gum digging industry.

To which we reply as follows:—

(1.) North of Auckland—British, 3,453; Maoris, 1,114; settlers who dig, 353; Austrians, 514; other foreigners, 345: total, 5,779. Coromandel and south of Auckland—British, 850; Maoris, 130; settlers who dig, 63; Austrians, 5; other foreigners, 70: total, 1,118. Making a total of diggers, 6,897. (For further particulars, see table attached.)

(2.) Five hundred and fourteen Austrians have come to the gumfields, some from the Broken Hill mines, and some from Dalmatia; but we have not been able to obtain any satisfactory evidence of the truth of the statements referred to in the question. (See our remarks *ante*.)

(3.) About 27s. per week. (See Appendix, page 4.)

(4.) If by the word "contract" is meant a contract to come to the colony and dig gum for others, we believe that no such system is or ever has been in operation; but if the word refers to agreements made with owners or lessees of gum-lands, relating to the disposal of the gum, such agreements undoubtedly exist, and the particulars relating to them will be found in our previous remarks on the subject, and in the Appendix. The relative proportions of persons working under such agreements to the north of Auckland, and of others, we estimate to have been in May, 1893, about 2,331 of the former, and 3,448 of the latter.