

Zealand, however, and he had been in the Auckland Province for many years. He was firmly convinced that the vile concoctions the diggers had to swallow emanated from the druggists' stores of Auckland. He was offered a 'wee drop' of the real stuff by a member of the party, and the happy smile that overspread his countenance betokened peace, perfect peace, at last. He could die happily now, and the other diggers who sampled were also very eulogistic in referring to the 'mountain dew.'

"The sky had cleared by this time, and the party pushed on again. From the brow of the hill the peaceful waters of the Pacific could be discerned, and then a magnificent kauri-forest was entered. Enormous trees, rising perpendicularly to a great height, branchless and flawless, lined the path and mountain-side, and afforded endless interest. Millions of feet of valuable timber were scattered over the country for miles around, and will remain so for years to come. Here and there huge ratas intruded upon the gaze, and numerous rata-vines, clutching with their death-dealing embrace the trunks of other trees preparatory to becoming the tree itself, were to be seen in all stages of development. This vast kauri-forest accompanied us to the head of the Kaihu Valley, which comprises some of the finest land in New Zealand. It runs away inland, and down to Dargaville, and the rich black soil can hardly be bottomed. The railway-line extends to Opanake, where the Premier and the Hon. J. Carroll were welcomed by Mr. Dargaville, and Mr. Harding, Chairman of the County Council. The seventeen miles of railway which traverses this beautiful block of land soon came to an end, and Dargaville, thickly dotted with houses, announced that bush regions, barren lands, and isolated habitations had been left behind. No *kai* had been partaken of since leaving Kawerua, and the evening meal was consequently much appreciated. Immediately afterwards business was proceeded with, the executive committee of the gumdiggers first engaging attention.

"The chairman of this representative committee asked that the Government would employ diggers during the present depression. He suggested that roads should be started to Crown lands, which could then be opened for settlement. Many of the diggers were very willing to settle, and if they had the gum-lands to assist them, that would serve in lieu of capital. They wanted some legislation enacted to prevent the influx of aliens and unemployed from the other colonies. The chairman assured the Premier that the Austrians merely came to the colony to make money. They said themselves that they would not settle here, but meant to return to their own country. He thought a license should be issued, and only to persons who had been in the colony for twelve months. A royalty should also be put on gum, but the digger would be glad to be free to buy and sell where he pleased. He complained bitterly of the truck system, which he said was pressing cruelly on the men. A royalty of 1s. 3d. could go to the County Council (he said) for rates, to give diggers a vote as ratepayers, and a 2s. 3d. rate could go to form a benefit fund for the diggers. He said many men were in a state of destitution on the gumfields, and at present the prospect for the winter looked very black indeed. The highest rate of wages was about £1 5s. a week, and it took an able-bodied man to make that amount.

"Mr. Seddon said he was considering the advisability of opening up the land for settlement and reserving the gum-lands to enable the settlers to procure some capital. (Applause.) If there was any roadmaking that would promote settlement it was desirable that the work should be proceeded with. This would absorb a lot of labour from the gumfields. He referred to the difficulty of dealing with the alien question. Once the men were here we could not control their methods of gaining a livelihood. That would be unconstitutional, and would involve a serious difficulty between England and foreign nations. In connection with Mr. King's remarks on the gum-market, the Agent-General had been instructed to inquire in England, on the Continent, and in America, and to endeavour to ascertain the cause of the present low prices. The Government would then know how to act. (Applause.) The truck system had been already dealt with by the Government, Mr. Seddon remarked, but that carried on in connection with the gumfields was very difficult to deal with. More agreement between employer and employé was necessary.

"The Premier said that as regards the main body of the gumdiggers the only thing the Government can do, as far as he could see at present, was to put in hand the different roads for which money had been voted, and put the married men who are now on the gumfields, as far as practicable, at constructing these roads. He stated that he was communicating with the Agent-General to ascertain the value of gums in the American, British, and Continental markets, and purposes purchasing samples of the different gums and sending them to him so as to assist him in ascertaining the Home value. This proposal greatly pleased the executive of the Gumdiggers' Association.

"The Premier told them plainly that there is no hope of the Government purchasing the gum, and they admitted it was impracticable. In view of permanently settling the people in the vicinity of the gumfields, the Premier said he intended to consult with the Minister of Lands as to throwing open more good land for settlement near the gumfields, and at the same time reserving a portion of the gum-bearing land for the exclusive use of those settlers, so that a portion of their time would be engaged in improving their land and another portion of their time could be devoted to digging for gum, which would stand to them as capital and would help them to ultimately become independent of the industry. In support of this scheme the Premier found that a large number of the settlers in the several districts he has passed through attribute their success to having been able to go and dig for gum occasionally, and by that means pay for their flour, sugar, and tea.

"The Premier said it was evident the Government would have to consider the advisability of resuming the ownership of all gum-lands, a statement which was received with great favour. The whole question, he promised, would be fully considered by the Cabinet at the conclusion of the tour. It would be premature to say anything at present.

"The deputation thanked Mr. Seddon with acclamation, and wished him every success, and long life to the Government.