

1909.

NEW ZEALAND.

KAURI-GUM INDUSTRY

(REPORT ON) BY MR. GOW.

*Return to an Order of the House of Representatives dated the 22nd October, 1909.**Ordered, "That there be laid before this House the report of Mr. Gow on the kauri-gum industry."—(Mr. STALLWORTHY.)*

REPORT.

SIR,—

17th November, 1908.

In accordance with the instructions contained in your memorandum of the 9th September last, I have to report that I proceeded to the Auckland gumfields districts, and beg to submit herewith the result of my investigations along the lines laid down by you.

During my visit to the fields I interviewed the majority of the wholesale gum-buyers, exporters, and various brokers in Auckland, the storekeepers on the fields, the executive members of the Auckland Gum-diggers' Union of Workers, and several of its branches, and also a great number of individual diggers and settlers at the principal fields, besides very many other persons who were able to throw any light on the conditions obtaining in connection with the digging and marketing of kauri-gum.

I went very fully and exhaustively into all matters connected with the industry with these persons; and, in addition to my remarks in reply to the specific questions contained in your memorandum, I have dealt with other matters which are considered by the residents of the fields as of great moment in connection with the present state of this very important but somewhat neglected industry.

(1.) THE NUMBER OF MEN EMPLOYED IN THE INDUSTRY

There are approximately about five thousand legitimate diggers, including Austrians, on the gumfields. By "legitimate diggers" I mean those whose living is made exclusively at digging. In addition to these there are about three or four thousand casual diggers—that is, settlers and their families who go out occasionally, and also the Maoris. A few men also go out to the fields from Auckland in the summer-time.

(2.) THE AVERAGE QUANTITY OF GUM OBTAINED AND PUT ON THE MARKET PER MONTH.

The last return—that for September of this year—shows that 555 tons was produced and marketed. This is the lowest return for ten years for a September month, except in 1901, when the quantity was as low as 498 tons.

The decrease is not confined to September. There is a general falling-off compared with last year of between 25 and 30 per cent.: compared with ten years ago the falling-off is about 40 per cent. For this year the average monthly production has been 495 tons.

(3.) PRICES PAID TO THE DIGGERS FOR THE DIFFERENT QUALITIES OF GUM.

According to a report supplied to me by Mr. Samuel Stafford, secretary of the Waipu Branch of the Auckland Gum-diggers' Industrial Union of Workers, the prices received by diggers for the different qualities of gum are as follows:—

At Waipu, Ruakaka, and Vicinity.

			Per Cwt.	
			s.	s.
Superior ordinary, termed three-quarters scraped	...	...	90	to 112
Fair ordinary	...	...	50	„ 60
Washed nuts	...	...	35	„ 40
Chips and dust	...	...	12	„ 14

NOTE.—Sometimes the diggers resrape and class the "superior ordinary" mentioned above, the new grade being valued from 120s. to 200s. per cwt. according to the degree of cleaning and quality. The paleness and clearness of the gum and the quantity in the sample fix its price.