

he had issued eight £2 licenses and thirteen at 5s. each; Purua, ten at £2 and twenty at 5s. They relied on the gum-buyers to get the fees from the diggers. He had no doubt but that licenses were "farmed out," an instance having come under his notice, and as the result of a special trip to Purua he had collected £13, and on which 10 per cent. commission was allowed.

ERNEST WILSON, Farmer, of Puwera.

*To Mr. Greville.*] He had been there twenty-five years or so, and he considered that the evidence as regards the number of men on the Otaika field was correct. He had a little poor land himself, but he was able to do something with it. His orchard of about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  acres had all been dug over for gum, and it was a profitable orchard, being chiefly in apples, the trees producing good fruit, and the trees had not been manured, although one portion which he had cropped had been manured. He considered that if the ploughable land on the gumfield was worked in the same way as the experimental plot it would pay all right, but it would not require to be taken up by a poor man, and the price should not be over £1 an acre. He had dug gum fifteen years ago, but from a farmer's point of view it was played out, as a man had better take a job at something else than dig gum there now; it was only an old man's field, although it was twelve years since he had been over it. At one time there were perhaps two hundred men on the flat from Turner's store to Hoey's—this was from fifteen to twenty years ago—but since then there had been a gradual decrease. The Austrians and Maoris at Morgan's place were paying Morgan a royalty to dig, but the Austrians were not supposed to dig on the reserve.

*To Mr. Stafford.*] When the two hundred men were there this was generally for the winter. If drained the Otaika Reserve would in time all be taken up. Fifteen years ago gum was worth £2 to £2 8s. Professional gum-diggers who came there now did not stay long, which was a sign that they did not do well. There might be young men on the field, but he could not say how many.

ALEXANDER PHILIP SPEEDY, Inspector under the Agricultural Department, Whangarei.

*To Mr. Greville.*] He had been in the district seven years. They had established experimental plots on gum reserves at Akerama, Kaitara, and at Otaika. At the first point they had 33 acres, all of which had been worked, and experiments with grasses were being conducted, the ground having been limed. In selecting the plot at Akerama they picked up probably the poorest piece of land on the reserve so as to see what could be done with land of that character. At Kaitara they had 500 acres; of this 52 acres had been ploughed. Lucerne was one of the crops they had grown, and until this last rain he had been very pleased with its appearance, but the ground was now very sodden, and the lucerne was not looking quite so well when he saw it yesterday. Part of the land had been subsoiled. At Otaika they had 31 acres, all of which had been ploughed, and he was satisfied from the appearance of the land that it could be brought into profitable use. At Akerama part of the land was in English grasses—brown-top, Western Wolths, crested dogstail, cocksfoot, *Lotus angustissimus*, *Lotus pilosa*, sheep's fescue, brome-grass, tall oat-grass, and yellow oat-grass. These had been laid down last autumn, and they were well pleased with the results so far, although it would take five years before they could judge definitely of the result; the indications at the present time were good. He knew no one who had dealt extensively with that poor land, and he believed the Government were the first to tackle land of that particular quality on any scale. He did not know Mr. H. H. Hawkins's place at Marua, but he imagined that his land was of better quality than what the Government were experimenting with. Subsoiling had not been done extensively—perhaps half an acre had been treated in this manner. Their endeavour was to fallow the ploughed land for about a year. He regarded the experiments as most encouraging, and considered that the Government was quite justified in continuing them.

*To Mr. Stafford.*] They had used slag, but the basis of the whole working had been liming.

*To Mr. Greville.*] The lime was worked into the soil. It would require a man with considerable capital to take up such lands, and a larger area could be brought in quicker if the requisite capital was available, but whoever took up these poor lands would have to wait some time for his returns, so that it was no use for a poor man to attempt it. He thought that it was quite warrantable to improve these lands with the view to their future settlement.

*To Mr. Stafford.*] A level-headed man would probably spend his money at the present time on the better-class lands than on the gumfields.

ALEXANDER HOEY, Storekeeper's Assistant, of Puwera.

*To Mr. Greville.*] He had lived at Puwera about eighteen years, and had been all over the Otaika Reserve. He considered there were about fourteen gum-diggers, mostly old-age pensioners, on the field, apart from settlers. He considered that half of the number were men who could do a good day's work. He did not know how much gum Mr. Hoey got from the field. In the winter-time they carted to Whangarei twice a week, always with two or three sacks of gum, and every fortnight or three weeks they made an extra trip. There would be  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cwt. to  $1\frac{3}{4}$  cwt. of good gum in a sack and, say,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cwt. second-class gum. They got the gum chiefly from Otaika, with odd pieces from Waikiekie, and the settlers also brought some gum in. From his gum-book his brother would be able to supply particulars of the gum sold by him during the last five years. Diggers camped close to the swamp brought the gum in. They also got gum from Pukeata, three or four miles off, the camp being about half a mile this side of Mr. Tavenor's place. Gum came from all over the reserve, the younger men going further out than the old men, who worked close to their camp. He considered that the average earnings of a digger were more than sufficient to pay for his stores, and counting the old men each digger would draw