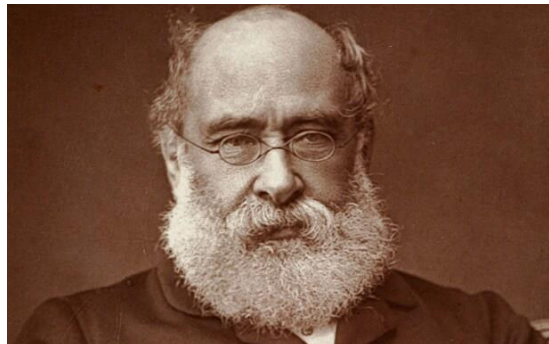


Anthony Trollope, Z and Kauri Gum

Sometimes when you are reading, you are brought up short. A word or phrase hits you, stands out on the page. New Zealanders are susceptible since the 'Z' on a page is quickly picked up by the eye, and 'New Zealand' is easily detected (we'll miss it when we go full on with Aotearoa!).

Reading, and with great pleasure, Anthony Trollope's *The Last Chronicle of Barset*, you find New Zealand appearing a few of times. It's a far off place where you could go to live cheaply and escape social pressures when you find you have less fortune than expected. Or, as with a young inn servant accused of stealing a cheque (the cheque that is central to the story), a place to flee to in escaping the law.



So reading deep into Trollope's *The Prime Minister*, a chapter heading in Volume II, "Kauri Gum", hits you between the eyes. The resin appears at the end of the chapter as a commodity ripe for speculation by the villain of the piece, the unscrupulous financial adventurer Ferdinand Lopez. Lopez carries with him all the prejudices of the heyday of Victorian England – he is dark (though handsome), a foreigner (obscure Portuguese origins but brought up in England), possibly Jewish, and although acknowledged by some sort of code as a gentleman, is not an 'English' gentleman, and so it proves. Lopez borrows and swindles his way into funds for ropery investments, including extracting money from his principled and honest father-in-law.

'They bought a cargo of kauri gum, coming from New Zealand. Lopez had reasons for thinking that kauri gum must have a great rise. There was an immense demand for amber, and kauri gum might be used as a substitute, and in six months' time would be double its present value. This unfortunately was a real cargo. He could not find an individual so enterprising as to venture to deal in a cargo of kauri gum after his fashion. But the next best thing was done. The real cargo was bought and his name and Sexty's name were on the bills given for the goods. On that day he returned home in high spirits, for he did believe in his own intelligence and good fortune.'

Usually, he and his grubby partner Sexty Parker, speculated on cargoes which never eventuated. Lopez has to provide his father-in-law, Mr Wharton, with a schedule of his business dealings, and clearly is reluctant to own up to the gum.

'In the meantime the two men outside the porch were discussing their affairs in somewhat the same spirit. At last Lopez showed his friend Wharton's letter, and told him of the expected schedule. "Schedule be d — d, you know," said Lopez "How am I to put down a rise of 12s. 6d. a ton on kauri gum in a schedule? But when you come to 2,000 tons it's £1,250. "
" He's very old; - isn't he? "
" But as strong as a horse."

"He's got the money?"

"Yes; - he has got it safe enough. There's no doubt about the money."

Lopez eventually demurs from providing the requested schedule.

"My dear Sir, - You have asked for a schedule of my affairs, and I have found it quite impossible to give it. As it was with the merchants whom Shakespeare and the other dramatists described, so it is with me. My caravels are out at sea, and will not always come home in time. My property at this moment consists of certain shares of cargoes of jute, kauri gum, guano, and sulphur, worth altogether at the present moment something over £ 26,000, I am engaged in sundry other smaller ventures, all returning profits; — but in such a condition of things it is impossible that I should make a schedule."

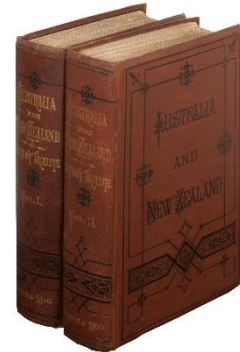
Trollope surely knew that Shakespeare's merchant, Antonio, from *The Merchant of Venice*, was ruined by the loss of his caravels at sea. You'll also be pleased to know that Lopez is ultimately ruined and throws himself in front of a train, though not before asking Lizzie Eustace, a wealthy if rather fast young woman (*'but perhaps a wild dash for a time into fast vulgarity was what in her heart of hearts she liked best...'*) from the earlier *'Eustace Diamonds'*, to run away to Guatemala with him (not New Zealand, Guatemala having a much more exotic and risqué feel about it).

Trollope was not just plucking New Zealand and kauri gum out of the air. Between the *Last Chronicle of Barse* (1867) and the *Prime Minister* (1876), he visited Australia and New Zealand. He spent about a year in Australia in 1871, then 2 months travelling from Bluff north to Auckland in 1872. The following year he published his travel account, *Australia and New Zealand*.² The New Zealand part of the book comprises the final 200 pages of the total roughly 1000 pages in two volumes. He lands at Bluff and *'immediately asked to be shown some Maoris...'* but finds that *'I might have well as asked for a Moa.'* He is immediately struck by the Englishness of it all, in Invercargill (!), and the mystery of a remote unknown land is dissipated. *'In New Zealand, everything is English.....If a long-sleeping Briton could be awaked and set down among the Southland hills, and told he was travelling in Galway or Cork, or in the west of Ross, he might be easily deceived...'*

There is much on the early history, birds and plants, moas, coastal steamers *'most irregular and heart-breaking'*, and travel by coach to Lake Whakatipu. He is driven by a Swede whom he mistrusts, as he is also the owner of the inn, and fears over-charging. This is Trollope, so we have a story: *'...of George III., who when charged a guinea by some innkeeper for a boiled egg, suggested with gentle sarcasm that eggs were probably scarce in that part of the country. "No your Majesty — but kings are."'* Trollope sails on the lake in a steamship at freezing temperatures, the ladies (he is with his wife) in opossum rugs, and the constant remarks on the Englishness of the scenery disappears as he views the Southern Alps.

Then to Dunedin through snow and mud, digging out horses, through goldrush towns and gold diggings, then the warmth of a Dunedin hotel. Dunedin, *'a remarkably handsome town'*, at the time is the most prosperous city in the country, and Trollope goes on at some length on Government and finance, and notes that the country is overpopulated with bishops, six

for a population only half as great as Manchester, and the population only 50% Anglican. There would be no *Barchester Towers* emanating from New Zealand. When he gets to the 'great Church-of England province of Canterbury', he provides a history of John Godley and the Canterbury association. He knew Godley as a boy at school and in the comparison with Wakefield in their immigration schemes, the latter comes out less favourably. While Wakefield was eager and hard-working, '*...he seems to have thought more of his own schemes than of the happiness of the colonists whom he proposed to send to their future homes, - and who was quite as anxious to rule his colonists from home by laws made by himself as was ever a Secretary of State in Downing Street.*'



Trollope writes many pages on Canterbury, Godley, the economics and progress of the settlement, and in Christchurch has this to say about the building of the cathedral: '*There is the empty space, with all the foundations of a great church laid steadfast beneath the surface; but it seemed to be the general opinion of the people that a set of public offices should be erected there instead of a cathedral....Public offices all the community will use. A cathedral will satisfy something less than one half of it; - and will greatly dissatisfy the other half.*' Well then!

There is a shortage of housemaids '*I would advise no young lady to go out to and colony either to get a husband, or to be a governess, or to win her bread after any so-called ladylike fashion. She may suffer much before she can succeed, or may probably fail altogether. But any well-behaved young woman who now earns £16 as a housemaid in England would find in New Zealand a much happier home.*' Trollope should have been introduced to Maria Thompson³ and other successful young women.

He travels on north to Marlborough, Blenheim and Picton, where he finds the son of a friend, '*superintending the creation of a railway from thence to Blenheim, - a railway with about 700 people at each end of it, and which may perhaps benefit in some remote way an entire population of 200 or 3000! The financial ministers of New Zealand have certainly been very brave.*' And then Nelson. '*I was very much in love with Nelson during the few hours that I passed there; but it is not the place to which I would send a young man to make a fortune.*' Trollope somehow fails to have any future vision. This is exactly the sort of place where young men and women came, if not to make their fortunes, then at least to be successful.

Trollope writes a long chapter on Māori; he likes and is amused by Maning's '*Pakeha Maori*' – well who isn't. And another chapter on economics, the eye of the British Government civil servant to the fore⁴. He reaches Auckland via Taranaki, and says: '*It may be well to notice here the fact that as Auckland considers herself to be the cream of New Zealand, so does New Zealand consider herself to be the cream of the British Empire. The pretension is made in, I think, every British colony that I visited.*' He thinks there is '*...no reason why Auckland should not rival London.*' And there is another comparison with the mother country. '*I must specially observe one point as to which the New Zealand colonist imitates his brethren and ancestors at home, - and far surpasses his Australian rival. He is very fond of getting drunk. And I would also observe to the New Zealander generally, as I have done to other colonists, that if he would blow his trumpet somewhat less loudly, the music would gain in its effect upon the world at large.*' Its now called punching well above your weight.

And he writes a page or two on kauri gum: *'Kauri gum – an article of trade found, as far as I am aware, only in the province of Auckland, - has been of material service to the colony.Kauri gum, at the wholesale price, is worth from 30s to 40s per cwt.; ...in 1870 the amount exported fetched £175,074; and in 1871 £167, 958.'* So we can see where Ferdinand Lopez in *The Prime Minister* gets his interest in the trade. There is more on Māori, Auckland, and he meets Sir George Grey living at Kawau Island *'turning a wilderness into a garden.'*

Trollope takes a steamer to Tauranga, visits the war site of Gate Pa and then travels inland to the hot water lakes. His first impressions of the hot pools is not encouraging. *'At Ohinemutu there is nothing pretty'*, and *'Further on there is a small square pool, round and in which Maoris are always clustering; on which no European would, I should imagine, ever desire to encroach, for the Maoris are many, and the waters are not much.'* His unfortunate views of Maoridom and the pools did change a little however; *'...about nine, when it was quite dark, I had bathed in another pool, behind the inn. Here I had gone in very light attire to make my first experience of these waters, my friend the Captain accompanying me, and here we had found three Maori damsels in the pool before us. But this was nothing, - nothing at least in the way of objection. The night was dark; and if they thoroughly understood the old French proverb which has become royally English, why should we be more obstinate or less intelligent.'*⁵ *I crept down into the pool, and as I crouched beneath the water, they encouraged me by patting me on the back. The place was black, and shallow, but large enough for us all. I sat there comfortably for half-an-hour while they conversed with the Captain, - who was a Maori scholar. Then I plunged into a cold river which runs into the lake a few yards from the hot spring, and then returned to the hot water amidst the renewed welcomings of the Maori damsels. And so I passed my first evening among geysers, very pleasantly.'* We hope his wife did as well. Trollope becomes something of a hot pool aficionado, bathing in the pools of the pink terraces and elsewhere, and finally moves on, water-soaked, to the Waikato, where he recounts the conflicts, then back to Auckland and three days later was on board a steamer heading for Honolulu and home.

The book is less a travelogue than an account of the colony, its history, economics, people, little of which was unique in print at the time. But every now and again Trollope bursts through, the slightly fastidious English gentleman, a good observer, but conservative, not really in tune with the energy and freedoms of the developing colony.

A year later in 1874, Trollope published the more obscure *Harry Heathcote of Gangoil. A tale of Australian bush life*. Again New Zealand, briefly, is a destination. In this book, the wealthy landowner Mr. Heathcote, *".... had been thinking of going to New Zealand, and had been talking about it to his wife, and to his children, and they had all agreed that it would be a good thing to go to New Zealand."*

And what of kauri gum? By the middle of the century it had become a major industry. The resin was found to be of particular value for glues and varnishes, exported from the 1840s to England and the USA. *'From 1850 to 1950, gum exports totalled 450,000 tons, and from 1850 to 1900 gum was Auckland's main export – ahead of gold, wool and kauri timber. Its total worth to the country has been estimated at around \$300 million (in 2006 terms).'*⁶



Kauri gum specimen from the Gumdiqger's Park, Awanui

Many Aucklanders and Northlanders are very aware of the history of the gumdiggers in the north. Dalmatians, Māori and British settlers joined in the mud and appalling conditions hoping to make a fortune, and if there was one, it was more likely to appear in the hands of speculators, though more successful than Ferdinand Lopez.

And finally back to 'Z' – even poets pick up on it. New Zealand poet Bill Manhire wrote this in 1981.

ZOETROPES

A starting. Words which begin
with Z alarm the heart:
the eye cuts down at once

then drifts across the page
to other disappointments.

*

Zenana: the women's apartments
in Indian or Persian houses.
Zero is nought, nothing,

nil - the quiet starting point
of any scale of measurement.

*

The land itself is only
smoke at anchor, drifting above
Antarctica's white flower,

tied by a thin red line
(5000 miles) to Valparaiso.

¹ See for example a social media stream:

https://www.reddit.com/r/newzealand/comments/1acp3io/are_we_really_the_best_in_the_world_at_spottin_g/

² **Trollope, A.** Australia and New Zealand. In two volumes. London: Chapman and Hall, 193, Piccadilly. 1873. Vol 1, 533 pp, frontis. coloured map, 2 folding maps, vol. 2, 516 pp, 4 folding maps. Bagnall 5621, Hocken 287.

³ <https://ianferg.nz/maria-thomson-plain-truths-alone-compose-the-substance/>

⁴ Trollope worked for many years in various positions in the British Post Office.

⁵ Likely to be the proverb: Better be a fool than obstinate.

⁶ Carl Walrond, 'Kauri gum and gum digging', Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/kauri-gum-and-gum-digging> (accessed 15 February 2025)