

not remain sufficiently long in force to get into proper working order, but would be superseded by another more applicable to the requirements of the Colony, have induced me to abstain from requiring owners and managers to make alterations involving an outlay of money, where the violation of the Act was not attended with risk to life.

Under an established and well considered Act, such as will soon I hope be passed, such latitude would of course be neither desirable nor permissible.

Although considerable publicity has been given to the proclamation of "The Regulation of Mines Act, 1874," and a copy was sent to all the managers of collieries, yet in some cases the copies sent had not reached their destinations at the time of my visit, and few of the workmen had ever heard of the existence of such a law.

The general condition of the mines when I visited them was exactly what it had previously been, in most cases no effort had been made to comply with any of the provisions of the Act, and it was very seldom that the time at my disposal allowed me to remain sufficiently long in any mining district to see the alterations which I required were efficiently carried out; in some cases, however, I have received letters from the managers informing me that in those particulars the Act had been complied with. Remarks on this subject will be found in the detailed report.

It is a well-known fact that "The Coal Mines Regulation Act, 1872," of Great Britain, was instrumental in raising the cost of producing coal to a very considerable extent; and I cannot help expressing a hope that any future legislation on this subject may not in this Colony be the means of checking an industry which ought to contribute, in a great degree, to the wealth and prosperity of the inhabitants.

The scarcity of skilled labour and direction, the difficulty of transport, the keen foreign competition, the eagerness of proprietors—firstly, in getting the surface coal and prejudicing the future workings; secondly, in expecting immediate returns from an investment which time only can develop, and which is abandoned before it has had time to bear fruit, added to the prejudice existing against the use of native coal, have caused many and disastrous failures to be recorded in the history of the coal industry of this country.

To render this industry productive, not only are skill and capital required, but undertakings on a larger scale than are in most cases at present carried on, are in my opinion necessary.

As shown by the statistics on this subject, there are several collieries in New Zealand producing large quantities of coal which is well known to be equal in quality to that imported from Australia; and when the new mines are in working order, and the harbour at Greymouth is rendered less dangerous, there is no reason to doubt that sufficient coal will be got in the Colony, not only to supply home consumption, but before long to support a foreign trade.

As regards safety in working, notwithstanding the late lamentable accident in Otago, there is no doubt that, with proper management and inspection, coal mining can be carried on without great loss of life. The statistics of deaths in Great Britain from this cause prove this assertion; in that country, in the year 1877, the number of persons employed per life lost was 409, or 2.445 deaths per 1,000 men, and the proportion of various accidents was—

1. Explosions of Firedamp	...	...	...	...	21.65
2. Falls of roof and sides	...	...	...	...	39.17
3. Deaths in shafts	...	...	...	...	16.46
					<hr/> 77.28
4. Miscellaneous underground	...	...	...	...	15.89
5. „ surface	...	...	...	...	6.84
					<hr/> 22.72
					<hr/> 100.00

But in that year, as will be remembered, accidents from explosions of fire-damp were exceptionally numerous, no less than 345 deaths having occurred from this cause, in comparison with 95 in 1876, thus raising the total number of deaths per million of tons raised, from 0.70 in 1876 to 2.57 in 1877.

"Falls of roof and sides" always cause the majority of deaths, and as the prevention of this class of accidents comes more within the province of the workmen themselves, they can generally only be prevented by care on the part of the employed, whereas the other classes of accidents, explosions, &c., cannot be avoided except by capital, and skill in management. Notwithstanding the period of bad trade through which the colony has been, and is still passing, and which has doubtless been the cause of several mines having been abandoned, it is gratifying to observe that the output of coal for the past year shews an increase of more than 20,000 on the returns for 1877.

There are several collieries which during the past few months have been putting out a quantity of coal, which would, should they continue to work in so satisfactory a manner, increase the yearly output by 20,000 tons, and besides this, we may reckon on a considerable quantity from the new mines on the West Coast, and from the Greymouth Company's Wallsend colliery, which ought soon to be re-commenced, so that allowing for only a small increase in the other mines, the outlook for the present year is sufficiently hopeful. The establishment of special rules in accordance with the Act was attended with considerable difficulty to the majority of the coal owners. I referred to this in a memorandum to you, dated April 25th, 1879, and it was eventually decided to draft a set of special rules, and forward them to all the collieries with a view to their adoption. The great difficulty of this, lay in the impossibility of making one set applicable to all the mines, but this was overcome by dividing the Rules under different headings; those only which were applicable to the condition of the mine, being in force there. Though not perfectly satisfactory, this course appeared to be the best under the circumstances.

At present I have, with few exceptions, no copies of mining plans up to date. In most cases the owners had either no plans at all, or those which they had were not of sufficiently recent date to be of