

PROSPECTING.

During 1886 very little of my time has been taken up by coal prospecting. The Mokihiini operations were mentioned last year, and have, I believe, been successful in showing a valuable coal-field. The Kanieri Coal Prospecting Association has been proceeding, but I am not aware with what result.

In June last, at the direction of the Hon. the Minister, I visited some prospecting works on the top of the Mihiwaka Tunnel, near Port Chalmers. There are some thin seams of coal, but the locality did not appear to me to indicate any definite deposit, so operations were soon after suspended.

ACCIDENTS.

I have again much pleasure in reporting a decrease in the number of accidents. Instead of sixteen separate accidents in 1885, injuring seventeen persons, and twenty-two in 1884, injuring an equal number, there were in 1886 only fifteen accidents, injuring fifteen persons. The greatest improvement is, however, in the fact that, while the deaths in this Island from coal-mining accidents have averaged, for the past six years, 2.16 per annum, during 1886 there has been no fatality whatever.

In addition to the accidents recorded in the accompanying table were three of so slight a character that, though reported, I have not included them.

The following particulars may be of interest :—

1. This was a very unfortunate accident. A young man named Fritz Norman, who had been from the first employed on the Westport Coal Company's Incline, and who was, when hurt, one of the contractors for lowering coal, was walking down the incline when a loaded truck struck him on the back, knocked him down, and eventually went over his foot, crushing it so badly as to render partial amputation necessary. The occurrence was duly reported.

3. John Hudson had his arm caught between a slack shoot, at the Banbury Mine, and the wagons. The accident—which was not reported for three days—caused him to be off work for about six weeks.

5. Referred to in the report on the Wallsend (Greymouth) Mine. Though the accident happened on the 12th, the notice was dated the 14th and postmarked the 17th.

6. Really hardly worth reporting, as it resulted merely in a sprained ankle, which cannot have been very severe, as Bannerman was at work again in three weeks.

7. This was a very serious accident, and was never reported. Mr. W. H. Williams, manager of the Shag Point Coal-mine, was intending to go up the shaft on the roof of the cage, the cage itself being occupied by a truck containing the underviewer, who had been made ill by the fumes arising from an underground fire. Mr. Williams had knocked three times, and the hammer had apparently struck; when the engine-man went to release it it struck one more, which he foolishly took for a signal from below, and proceeded to start the engine. At this moment Mr. Williams was partly on the cage, and his leg was caught by the side of the shaft, causing injuries which incapacitated him for four months.

12. This caused cessation from work for a fortnight only, and was caused by William Pringle failing to go into a safe place while he was firing a shot. No bones were broken.

14. Was a very serious accident. McCracken was repairing a road and took a prop out without setting any timber to save himself. A piece of roof fell, and caused very severe injuries. He states that no blame is attributable to the management. After being upwards of five months in the Dunedin Hospital, McCracken has left it, by no means perfectly recovered from his injuries.

15. Though the injuries received in this case were very trifling I always consider an accident from explosive gas as a serious matter, because it is very seldom that such an occurrence happens without some fault on the part of the management of a mine, or some breach of the law on the part of a miner. This occurred as follows: Between 5 and 6 o'clock on the morning of the 17th November the heading was examined by the deputy with a safety-lamp, and also between 1 and 2 o'clock in the afternoon: on neither occasion was any gas found. At 8 p.m. the deputy passed through with a safety-lamp, but did not examine for gas. This was perfectly correct, according to the Special Rules formed under "The Regulation of Mines Act, 1874," which I take (S. R. 30. "Once in every twenty-four hours, if one shift is employed, and once in every twelve hours, if two shifts are employed, the underviewer shall," &c.). And these rules were, by section 31 of "The Coal Mines Act, 1886," actually in force at the time. At about 10 p.m. the deputy sent two men in to do some odd jobs, and, while one of them (Kean) was bending down to the flatsheet (I doubted this portion of the evidence, and therefore made particular inquiries, all of which tended to the belief that he was bending down) with a naked light, an explosion of gas occurred, which burned him, causing a ten days' cessation of work, though, as he informed me, he "might have been at work sooner." Of course a technical breach of General Rule 41 was committed. This enacts that the inspection of working-places in every mine in which inflammable gas has been found within the preceding twelve months, shall be made within two hours before the time fixed for the miners commencing work. Mr. Bishop informed me that the new Act had been received by him only a few days before the explosion, and that Roberts, the deputy, had never seen a copy. It also seemed to me that, as the deputy had examined the place at 1 p.m. with a safety-lamp and at 8 o'clock with a naked light, and as Kean had been in the ends of both the bord and the heading immediately before the explosion without finding any gas, and the supply must have commenced very suddenly—in fact that the occurrence partook of the nature of a sudden outburst. I therefore placed the facts fully before the department at head office, and was instructed, by your telegram of the 11th December, that the Hon. the Minister directed proceedings to be stayed.