

were practically suspended; and further delay was occasioned by the inability of the company to secure the services of Mr. Wright, mining engineer, to inspect and report upon their special claim, and suggest the best method of working it. The legal proceedings which had been hampering the operations of the company have been recently adjusted by compromise, and, the plans and report of Mr. Wright having been received, there are now eight or nine men employed in prospecting operations, in accordance with Mr. Wright's recommendations, and present indications warrant the belief that a permanent reef may yet be discovered in the company's special claim.

The Red Queen claim has been in full work throughout the past year, and several crushings have taken place. The reefs or leaders operated upon have been so small, and the surrounding rock so hard, that the results have been unprofitable, and no dividends have accrued to the shareholders. Work has been suspended for two or three weeks past, and a meeting of shareholders has been convened to consider the future operations of the company.

The Mokihinui Company have done nothing except keeping their battery and water-race in repair. This company owns the only crushing-machine in the district, and, though maintaining the same and keeping a long water-race in repair at a loss of money, they generously place these conveniences at the disposal of other companies at a very reasonable rate of charge.

The Southern Light Company has for some considerable time been busily engaged in opening up their mine. Under the direction of an able manager this work has been carried on with great success, as is evidenced by the fact that the connections with the battery are near completion and a quantity of stone ready for crushing, which is expected will be commenced in about a month. The reef is on the same line but above the Red Queen claim, but the ground is good soft working, and can be wrought at far less cost than that of the Red Queen.

The Guiding Star Company is in a peculiar position. In order to work their stone the company would have to drive a long tunnel, which would be a direct advantage to many claims beside their own. The cost of this work would be greater than one company could bear, and those claims which would benefit thereby are unable or unwilling to co-operate with the Guiding Star. The company has £300 lying at fixed deposit, which would be spent in carrying out the necessary operations if other companies deriving a direct benefit from the work would contribute proportionately.

The Nile Company have discontinued prospecting operations of late owing to financial troubles. When a proper understanding has been arrived at among the shareholders work will be resumed, as the prospects in the mine are exceptionally encouraging.

The Smile of Fortune Company have during the period in which they carried on the operations in the past term kept solely to surface-prospecting. Their ground adjoins that of the Great Republic Company on the south, whose operations and the results obtained are taken as a guide for the direction of the Smile of Fortune Company's affairs.

The South Pacific Company have extended their main tunnel about 85ft. during the past twelve months, and have also done some general prospecting; but no encouraging developments have rewarded the company so far.

Sulphate of barium has been found recently at Cascade Creek, and a prospecting-license has been granted. This mineral is known to exist in considerable quantities, and the discoverers are now endeavouring to ascertain the value of it, and whether a market can be found for large quantities. No doubt if they are favourably advised upon these two points they will lose no time in turning their discovery to profitable account.

*Gold-mining Leases.*—During the past year four gold-mining leases have been applied for at Westport, fourteen have been granted, and six cancelled or forfeited; at Charleston, three applied for and three granted.

*Population.*—There has been a small increase of population in and around Westport, and possibly a slight decrease at Charleston.

*Coal-mines.*—The Koranui Mine has been closed since December last, resulting in a diminution of population at Waimangaroa and a corresponding depression in business in that neighbourhood. On the other hand, mining operations have been carried on with greater energy and activity at Denniston, and many of the coal-miners thrown out of work by the closing of the Koranui Mine have been taken on at Denniston, the net result being that the output of coal has not decreased despite the closing of the Koranui Mine.

The Westport Harbour Board have shown great energy in carrying on works in connection with harbour improvements. Three quarries are now being worked, and the average quantity of stone placed *in situ* daily amounts to fully 500 tons. As the bridge about to be constructed across the Buller River is to be made available for ordinary traffic, there can be no doubt it will prove a great boon to the district generally, and its value would be immeasurably enhanced by the construction of a road along the western bank of the river to the Nine-mile Crossing, which would open the bridge for all up-country traffic, and do away with the danger, delay, and expense which travellers must inevitably submit to when dependent upon the present ferry system.

*School of Mines.*—As one of the results of Professor Black's visits to this district, and the lectures delivered by him at Westport, great interest has been created in mineralogy and cognate branches of science, and a School of Mines comprising forty-two members has been in existence for some time past. Weekly meetings are held, at which lectures are delivered and the usual tests and analyses practised. A small building has been obtained by the members, but it is found to be quite unfitted for their requirements, and they are now taking steps, in conjunction with the Public Library and Athenæum Committee, to erect a commodious building at a cost of about £500 for their joint purposes, including accommodation for a geological museum. A good site has already been secured for the building, and I understand that the public are responding liberally in the way of subscriptions. An institution of this sort is calculated to assist materially in the development of the mineral resources of the district, as it cannot fail to diffuse a wider knowledge of metals and minerals amongst those engaged or interested in mining pursuits. The movement, therefore, seems to be deserving of every encouragement, and one which would undoubtedly be carried to a speedy and successful issue if aided by the Government.