

the Golden Fleece Mine, at Murray Creek, in that district. There are only eight mines in the colony yet opened for supplying bituminous coal—namely, Kawakawa, at the Bay of Islands; Wallsend, Collingwood, Mokihinui, and Coalbrookdale, in the Westport district; and Brunner, Coal-pit Heath, Wallsend, and Tyneside, in the Greymouth district.

The total number of men employed in coal-mining is 1,689, as against 1,499 for 1887, being an increase last year of 190; but some of the mines are only yet doing preliminary work, and not sending much coal to market.

The average output per man last year was 363 tons, as against 372 tons for the previous year; but it will be seen by referring to table No. 5, attached, that the average is reduced by the lignite-pits and small mines at Reefton being included, where the average per man was only 225 tons. Were these deducted from the output of the other mines the average per man employed is about 380 tons for the year; while the average output from the mines in Great Britain and Ireland for 1887 was 329 tons for every person employed. The average output in the colony compares very favourably with that in older countries, and more especially so when the amount of dead work done last year is taken into consideration. In making this comparison it may be stated that out of 526,277 persons employed in the mines of Great Britain and Ireland last year there were 43,946 youths between the ages of ten years and sixteen years, and 4,183 females, which would in some measure account for the low average. The value of the coal at the mines in Great Britain varies in different districts, the highest being 7s. per ton, in Somersetshire and Westmoreland, in England, and the lowest, 3s. 8d. per ton, at Kinross, Scotland, the average being about 4s. 10d. per ton. This is less than the cost of coal at the mines in this colony, and has to be taken into consideration by our coal-mine owners when it is necessary to find markets for coal in foreign countries.

FUTURE PROSPECTS OF THE COAL-MINES.

In regard to the further development of the coal industry, it will in a great measure depend on the trade that can be opened up in other countries. This will be regulated, so far as New Zealand is concerned, by the depth of water in the harbours of Greymouth and Westport, as it is only in those districts where coal suitable for foreign markets can be procured in large quantities.

In exporting coal the question of freight is a large factor in the price at which it can be delivered in foreign markets. This necessitates the employment of large vessels, carrying at least 2,000 tons on one bottom, in order to successfully compete with coal sent from other countries. The development of the industry is not likely to be rapid, but more of a slow, gradual increase year by year. From what is known of the bituminous coalfields in the colony, Mr. Park, of the Geological Survey staff, in a paper read before the Philosophical Institute, estimated that there were 187,000,000 tons, of which 177,000,000 tons were in the Greymouth and Westport districts.

ACCIDENTS IN COAL-MINES.

There were eighteen accidents last year in the coal-mines—four of which proved fatal—as against thirty-one for the year previous. It is impossible, with all the precautions taken, to secure an entire immunity from accidents. The workmen themselves are in most cases to blame for not using sufficient care, and the Inspectors have in some instances prosecuted them for their carelessness. The most efficient precaution against accidents would be for the workmen to co-operate amongst themselves to see that the spirit of the Act is strictly enforced in the mines where they are employed, and for each of them to strictly conform thereto, and, when they find any of their fellow-workmen neglecting anything that should be done, to at once inform the manager, and insist upon proceedings being instituted against them. It is only by a cordial co-operation of the managers and workmen that the Inspectors can hope to secure an immunity from serious accidents.

EARNINGS OF THE MINERS.

Gold-mining.—The actual number of persons engaged in gold-mining on the 31st March last was 13,497, and at the end of last year 11,720, making an average for the year of 12,609; while the average for the year previous was 11,751: thus showing an increase in the number last year of 858. The value of the gold obtained was £831,907, which makes the average earnings of the miners £65 19s. 6d. per man. For the previous year it was £65 4s. 3d.

Coal-mining.—The number actually engaged in coal-mining at the end of 1887 was 1,499, and the number at the end of 1888 was 1,689; making the average for last year 1,594, as against 1,552 for the year previous. Taking the output of coal last year at 613,895 tons, and allowing 6s. per ton as the cost of getting and loading at the mine ready for the market, the average earnings of the miners would be about £109 per man. Making a comparison between the average earnings of the coal-miners in Great Britain and the colony, the earnings in the colony are double those at Home.

KAURI-GUM.

Although this industry has been carried on for the last thirty-six years, the quantity exported every year, with few exceptions, has been increasing; and when it is taken into consideration that no expensive outfit is required—simply a spade and a spear—it will be seen that it is an enterprise suitable to the working-man. The value of the gum exported last year was £380,933, as against £362,449 for the previous year; thus showing an increase of £18,494. A field of this description in the vicinity of a large populous city like Auckland must have a beneficial effect in finding profitable work for the unemployed. It is also the means of livelihood of a considerable number of the Native population, and affords employment to many of the small settlers in the vicinity of the gum-fields. It is, however, an industry in which considerable care must be exercised by the gum-digger when working in the kauri forests during the dry season, in order to prevent bush-fires taking place, which prove very disastrous to the forests themselves. A sum of £254 10s. was realised from licenses to dig gum within the State forests during last year, that being the first in which any such charge was made.