

Extended, 3,180 tons; Shag Point, 2,808 tons; and Abbotsford, 2,618 tons; whilst the principal decreased output has been in the Westport Colliery Company's mines at Brunner.

It will be the duty of the Government to guard against undue amalgamations or transfers of leases, especially those containing bituminous coal, so as to cause monopolies inimical to the interests and welfare of the colony. We have already one company, one-half of the shareholders who reside in a neighbour colony, holding the principal mines on the west coast of the Middle Island where bituminous coal is raised, and, judging from the tenders sent in last year for the supply of fuel for our railways, if the whole of the mines were held by one company the cost of fuel would be considerably increased.

Last year a contract for the supply of 15,000 tons of coal for our railways was taken by the Mokihinui Company; but, owing to their steamer being wrecked, and the company not being able to get vessels to enter the Mokihinui River to take the coal away, the contract had to be handed over to the Grey Valley Coal Company to carry out on behalf of the contractors; but had the Mokihinui Company not been in existence the contract price would have been increased from 1s. to 2s. per ton. In about twelve months the Westport-Ngakawau railway extension will be completed to Mokihinui, bringing the mine into direct communication with Westport, which will enable the company to enter into competition with other coal proprietors in supplying coal.

During last year a large seam of excellent bituminous coal was opened up at Blackball, in the Grey district, and it is said the Midland Railway Company intend to construct a branch line to the mine, so that the coal can be conveyed to Greymouth for shipment. Another new mine has also been taken up by a Co-operative Company, formed of colliers and others, on the south side of the Mokau River in the North Island, about twenty miles up from its mouth, and, although the coal is not to be compared for steam purposes to that found on the west coast of the Middle Island, it is a good household coal, and should find a ready market within the colony.

In regard to the future working of the coalmines, it is the intention of the Government to make it compulsory for the holders of coal leases to work them, and comply with the conditions under which they were granted, or the leases will be cancelled. The recommendations of the Westland Coal-fields Committee in 1889, with reference to the Granity Creek lease, are receiving the attention of the Government, and steps will be taken to compel the holders to comply with the conditions of the lease. The owners of the Coal Creek and the Collingwood coal-leases have been notified that, unless progress is made in carrying on mining operations, steps will be taken to cancel the leases. In one case, a large money deposit has been insisted on to show that the company intends to begin the construction of their railway at an early date. The valuable suggestions made in the report of the Royal Commission appointed to inquire into the condition of the Grey Valley mines will also receive due attention, and future leases will be prepared having more uniform conditions. Mr. Cochrane has been appointed an additional Inspector of Mines, so that the public interests may be better conserved and the mines kept in good condition, as recommended by the Commission.

The number of men employed last year in connection with the coalmines was 1,846, of which number 512 men were employed on the surface and 1,334 men in the underground workings, showing that nearly 28 per cent. of the number employed are connected with works on the surface. The average output per man for the year has been 345 tons; but if we deduct the lignite raised, and persons employed in these pits, the average output from the mines last year would be increased to 352 tons.

#### EARNINGS OF THE MINERS.

*Gold-mining.*—It is very difficult to accurately ascertain the number of persons employed in gold-mining, as the returns furnished are in some instances based on the number of miners' rights issued, and it is well known many persons hold these who are employed at other avocations. The returns show that on the 31st March last there were 13,032 persons engaged in gold-mining, and at the end of the previous year there were 13,787, which makes an average of 13,409 for last year. Therefore, taking the value of the gold obtained for the same period—namely, £685,321, it gives the average yearly earnings of the miners as £51 2s. 7d. per man, as against £59 16s. 6d. for the previous year. The amount of average annual earnings is arrived at on the same basis as in former years, and shows a falling off in the earnings of the miners to the extent of £8 13s. 11d. per man, which may be partly set down to the extremely dry season and consequent scarcity of water.