

*Thames.*

The mines in this district are looking better than they have done for years past. It is true there were no large dividend-paying mines last year, but the greater portion of them are paying working-expenses, while some of the companies have returned to the shareholders good interest on the capital invested; and it is gratifying to find that the mines in general are being worked on a satisfactory basis. More with the view of making them dividend-paying ventures than with the object of making money by traffic in the sale of shares. Some of the mines on the Grahamstown Flat are getting down to considerable depths, and the day is not far distant when deeper levels will have to be made. This is a question involving considerable expenditure, but it is one that will have to be faced. The Saxon Company has only about two years' work before the lode is stoped out from the No. 6 level, and sinking cannot be continued until drainage is effected to a greater depth.

At present the drainage is effected by what is known as the Big Pump, under the control of the Drainage Board. This pumping plant originally was constructed to drain the Winter's Freehold property at Ballarat, but was never erected there. It was purchased and erected at the Thames, the Government giving £50,000 for its purchase and erection. The steam-engine is one of the largest in the colonies, the cylinder being 82in. in diameter, and of sufficient length to admit of a 10ft. stroke for the piston. It is what is known as a Bull direct-acting condensing-engine. The steam is supplied by four Cornish steam-boilers. The pumps are 24in. in diameter. When this plant was first erected the shaft was sunk to a depth of 640ft., and pumping was carried on from this depth until about four years ago, the working-expenses being about £470 per month. The pumps were lifted to drain the water to the 400ft. level, in order to reduce the expenditure; but about twelve months ago they had to be put down to the 500ft. level, to allow the Saxon Company to carry on their workings. During my visit to this district in November the pump was being worked with an 8ft. stroke, making five strokes a minute, and the working-expenses were said to be from £320 to £330 per month, the quantity of Kamo coal consumed being from 275 to 280 tons per month, which costs, landed, 17s. 1½d. per ton. The following mines contributed towards the working-expenses of this plant: namely, Hansen, Comer's, Hazelbank, Moanataiari, Caledonian, Cambria, Trenton, New Prince Imperial, Saxon, Victoria, May Queen, Crawford's Special Claim, and the Waiotahi; the County and Borough Council contributing about £35 per month. Many of the mines mentioned are worked only on the upper levels, and get no benefit from the drainage, and, consequently, the heaviest portion of the expenses come on a few companies who are working at the deep levels. At the present time the Drainage Board finds it very difficult to get sufficient money to keep the plant at work. So long as present mining companies can make the mines pay for working, the drainage will be accomplished; but when the time comes when all the payable lodes are stoped out down to drainage-level a collapse will inevitably take place. At the present, when the different companies are all making their mines pay for working, is the time to combine together and prospect deeper levels than have yet been reached.

At Tapu there are a few claims being worked, but none of them are giving large returns. D. Sheridan has recently completed a low level, and cut the lode, which shows fairly good gold. There has been 179½ tons of quartz crushed from five claims during the past year, which yielded 164oz. 15dwt. of gold. Sometimes rich specimens are got in this locality, but as a rule the lodes are very small.

The principal mines on the field are situate in the vicinity of the Moanataiari, Waiotahi, Waiokaraka, and Karaka Creeks, and on the Grahamstown Flat, at Una Hill and Te Papa. The total gold produced from the mines in the whole district last year was 34,498oz. 19dwt. from 40,495 tons of quartz, and 3,613oz. 13dwt. from 15,000 tons of tailings. The claimholders, employing 586 wages-men in the mines, have crushed 37,679 tons of quartz, which yielded 31,119oz. 10dwt. of gold; and 115 tributers crushed 2,815 tons, which yielded 3,379oz. 9dwt. of gold. This shows that the yield of gold produced from mines worked on wages is equal to 53oz. 2dwt. 2gr. for each man employed, and 29oz. 7dwt. 17gr. for each tributer; or, taking the average of the tributers and wages-men, it amounts to 49oz. 4dwt. 3gr. of gold for every man employed in mines on the field. This shows that mining is in a prosperous condition in the Thames district; and by referring to the tabulated statement hereto annexed it will be seen that all the mines have been getting less or more gold. The workings in a few of the principal mines merely are referred to here, but the statement alluded to will give the results of each mine on the field.

*Sylvia Company.*—This company have not done much work in their mine during last year, the operations being chiefly confined to the erection of an aerial tramway to connect the mine with the reduction plant, and the erection of machinery. The ore found in this company's mine is different from any hitherto found in the vicinity of the Thames, being a combination of galena, blende, gold, silver, and copper, and iron-pyrites, which show by assay to be rich in both gold and silver. Dr. A. Scheidel, who is managing director of the company, states that he made a large number of assays from the ore at different places while driving on the lode, and very high results were often recorded. Assays of blende-ore went as high as 26oz. of gold and 87oz. of silver to the ton, whilst the assays of galena-ore went in some instances 49oz. of gold and 177oz. of silver per ton. About 600 tons of ore is stacked at the mouth of the mine, ready to be transmitted to the reduction-works as soon as they are completed.

The company's claim consists of 149 acres, taken up in 1887. Portion of the ground was worked ten years previous to this by Taylor and Sons, who held a claim of 3 acres, then known as the Little Agnes, from which a considerable quantity of gold was obtained. It is stated that the amount of gold from the claim sold to one of the banks was 2,695oz., representing a value of £6,587. In stoping out the lode in the early days large veins of heavy mineralised ore were cut, but partially left in the walls, as the value of such ore was not then known. The present company commenced prospecting, and extending the level that Taylor and Sons had constructed, and came