

SCHOOLS OF MINES.

There seems to be an increasing interest taken in our Schools of Mines. Miners are now fully alive to the necessity of having a good technical education, and, indeed, there is no profession or avocation which requires a greater amount of technical knowledge than that of mining. Those actively engaged in this industry should have a thorough knowledge of the chemistry of metals and minerals, be well up in metallurgy, mineralogy, geology; as well as having a knowledge of the strength of materials, the composition of gases and explosives, and also underground surveying. To follow the calling of a miner, and to be able to carry on large operations, it requires not only years of study, but much hard labour in the underground workings, to acquire the necessary knowledge to be able to cope with all the difficulties which occur in the management of mines. The Schools of Mines are supplying a want which a few years ago was not felt by individual miners; but, now that the advantages of a good technical education are being realised, miners see the necessity for it, and, facilities for its acquisition being available, they are anxious to acquire it.

At the Thames, men who work in the mines during the day attend the school at night, and the progress they make is really astonishing. Men who, a few years ago, could hardly write, are now well up in mathematics, and can undertake the underground surveys of any mine. The average number of regular students at the Thames School last year was fifty-two, while the average number attending Saturday lectures was fifty-three. Twenty-one parcels of ore, varying from 70lb. to 2,900lb. each, were tested for different individuals at the testing plant attached to the school. The work in connection with these tests was all done by the students.

At Reefton, the Director and Instructor of the School of Mines held classes in different parts of the district last year, and, although there is not so good an attendance at the principal school at Reefton as there is at the Thames School, the progress made by the students has been very satisfactory.

At the request of the Committee of the Thames School, I caused examination-papers to be prepared by examiners having no connection with these Schools of Mines, and the result of the last year's examination shows that the teachers have been very successful in their labours.

As there are several minor schools on the West Coast where no regular teacher attends to give instruction, I have engaged Mr. Thompson, the Resident Engineer at Greymouth, who was formerly lecturer on applied mechanics at the Otago University—and who holds high testimonials as to his knowledge in chemistry, mineralogy, and metallurgy—to deliver lectures on mining subjects at the several Schools of Mines in this district.

The report of the Directors of the School of Mines attached to the Otago University, Dunedin, shows that far more interest is taken in this school than there was a few years ago. Before the different Schools of Mines were established there were only two or three students attending this school, and last year there were twenty-two students, showing that the interest taken in the various mining centres where Schools of Mines have been established has given an impetus to students to acquire a knowledge of subjects connected with mining. Notwithstanding that the Government have paid £3,750 towards this school out of votes appropriated to Schools of Mines, the department has not received any report on the progress made until last year, when a report published in one of the local newspapers came to hand. During last year the total expenditure on the Schools of Mines amounted to £1,232.

SUMMARY OF EXPENDITURE ON WORKS.

The total value of works constructed by the Mines Department since votes for that purpose have been under the control of the Minister in charge, is as follows: Roads and tracks, £260,214; water-races, £51,576; drainage channels, £21,401; prospecting works, £50,907; wharves, £436; diamond and other drills, £4,448; assistance towards the treatment of ores, £1,342; artesian well boring, £550; Schools of Mines, inclusive of £3,750 paid to the University of Otago, £15,590: making a total of £406,464, out of which £296,348 was paid by Government; and the liabilities on works in progress at the end of March last were £16,917. A detailed statement of the cost and expenditure on these works will be found in the tables annexed to the report of the Inspecting Engineer on the goldfields of the colony.