

CHARLESTON.

It is estimated that about one hundred and fifty miners are employed in mining in this district. On Charleston Flat, Candlelight, and the Black Lead there are about twenty-six claims, which employ about fifty-six men, whose average earnings are about £2 10s. per week. At Croninville there are three claims, employing six men; these claims have a good supply of water, and are doing fairly well. At Brighton and St. Kilda there are about eighteen miners, principally working beach claims, which only give occasional work when there is black sand on the beach; at other times the men are employed in land-cultivation. In Darkie's Creek there are five parties working creek claims, and they are reported to be doing extremely well. On the Nine-mile Beach there are twenty miners working claims when there is any payable sand to work. In former years these claims paid exceedingly well, but of late years the beach has been covered with a grey sand, which is not payable, and consequently the miners have had very small returns from their claims. Most of these miners are Shetlanders, a thrifty and industrious people, and, when not working their claims, they employ themselves in the cultivation of their small freehold homesteads.

Cement-crushing.—During the year five new batteries have been erected in the district, making altogether twelve crushing cement, which are all said to be doing well. There is another battery in course of erection by Messrs. Turner and Calvert, at Brown's Terrace. They have been engaged for the last eighteen months in making dams, races, and tunnels, and they will soon be ready to commence crushing, and the claim promises to be a rich one.

One hundred and ninety-eight miners' rights were issued during the year, and the total gold-field's revenue was £234 0s. 6d. The total population of Charleston is estimated at 590.

The Four-mile Water-race.—The Buller County Council raised a loan of £4,960 for the construction of what is called the extension of the Argyle Water-race. This extension is six miles and three-quarters long. Some 25 chains of the race would not carry water without fluming, and, the money being all spent, the race was not completed. It is estimated by the County Engineer that this fluming and other necessary repairs to the race would cost £300.

Along the inside race there is a syphon some 1,800ft. long, about 800ft. of which requires renewing, and will cost about £400. Fourteen parties, comprising about thirty men, have been using water from this race. The cost of management and maintenance during the year was £455 19s. 2d., and the sales of water realised £451 8s. 10d., showing a loss of £4 10s. 4d. The cause of a loss instead of a large profit is attributed to the frequent breaks in the long syphon, and other damage to the inner race being very costly, and also to the loss of revenue from the water owing to these breaks, by the consequent stoppage of water-supply to the miners. Unless the extension of the race is completed, and the weak portions of the syphon renewed, there will be no regular supply of water, as that in the dam, which seldom fills, only lasts six weeks. It is estimated that, if completed, a profit of, at least, £200 per annum may be fairly anticipated; more ground would be taken up, and steady employment provided for many more miners.

The non-completion of this race falls very heavily on the miners of the district, who are heavily taxed to pay the interest on the loan, instead of deriving a benefit from the race, as they would do if the work was satisfactorily completed and a regular supply of water secured.

The Westport Prospecting Association.—This Association, which was assisted by a Government subsidy of £1 for £1, has been carrying on its operations in the Kawatiri district, near the Fairdown. About 360ft. has been driven, which has pretty well exhausted the funds. The Association, however, expects to obtain further assistance to enable them to continue the tunnel and thoroughly test the ground.

MOKIHINUI AND GRANITY CREEK.

There is nothing to report with regard to gold-mining in this locality. A great many applications have been received and granted for occupation licenses during the year, as shown by the annexed return. Very general complaints are made of the very unsatisfactory tenure of these licenses, and I am of opinion that some steps should be taken to have the question of tenure settled on a more equitable basis. At present the holders of town sections at Seddonville have to pay £3 per annum (business license) for quarter-acre sections, while the village settlers adjoining the township only pay 3s. per acre for 5-acre allotments. Then, at Granity Creek, there is another grievance: that people are unable to obtain Millerton sections excepting at auction. Now, as no one can hold more than one section, I fail to see any reason why, after the sections have once been submitted to auction, applicants should not be allowed to select sections at the upset price. As I before reported, there is a good deal of hill-land on the Buller Coal Reserve that is not coal-bearing, and which would, I believe, readily let if it could be obtained in larger areas—say, not exceeding 320 acres—and without compulsory residence. Possibly a modification of the agricultural-lease regulations might meet the case, but the rent would have to be altered to, say, not exceeding 2s. per acre.

It has been suggested that the coal reserve should be again brought under the Land Act, and the land dealt with under the "village settlement" and "perpetual lease" sections of the Act, but it must be borne in mind that most of the land required at Mokihinui for small holdings is on the surface of coal leaseholds.

It is also desirable that "The Westland and Nelson Coalfields Administration Act, 1887," should be amended, so as to give power to the Warden, with the approval of the Minister of Mines, to lease to coal companies certain surface rights within or outside the boundaries of their coal-lease areas for the erection of machinery, coke-ovens, managers' houses, &c.; also for paddocks for horses used in connection with the mine. I think, also, power should be obtained to grant timber licenses to companies requiring mining timber, outside their lease boundaries. The regulations under the Mining Act seem only to apply to hand-sawyers and mill-owners.

COLLINGWOOD AND TAKAKA.

There has been very little change in this part of the Karamea district since my last report. The Parapara Hydraulic Sluicing and Mining Company has been pushing on its tunnel and pipe-line