

THAMES DISTRICT.

There has been a considerable falling-off in the yield of gold in the Thames district during last year. This may be expected as year by year passes by, unless some new finds be made apart from the present workings. Really very little prospecting has been done in the back country, and from the character of the rock there is every probability of rich lodes being yet discovered. All the workings of the Thames proper have been confined to Grahamstown, or, at least, within a radius of three miles of that place. This portion of the field has been prospected, and, as far as at present known, the richest portions of the lodes occur above the water-level, or above the level to which the Big Pump can keep down the water. The present companies which hold claims on this field have not the means to test the ground below the depth of the present drainage level, either individually or collectively, and yet they place a considerable value upon the ground below the present water-level, which, so far as their own efforts are concerned, is really valueless to them. There is no doubt a feeling that possibly a mining boom will take place, and some capitalist will yet come forward and purchase their properties at a fictitious value, for it can only be termed this, even if it is actually known that gold exists in large quantities below the 500ft. level, where the present proprietors of the claims cannot find the means to procure it.

There is a considerable area of ground yet to work above the 500ft. level in many of the claims, but this is gradually getting less as year after year passes by, and the time will most assuredly come when these claims will prove unremunerative for working, and when that time does come the present holders will have to throw up the ground, or it will become forfeited. It would therefore be far more prudent, and in the interest of the district, that steps should be at once taken to devise a reasonable scheme whereby the ground can be tested at the deep levels before the place is brought into a state of utter stagnation.

The Thames is different from any other quartz-mining district in the colony, owing to the large quantity of water that is met with at the deep levels, and the probable increase as a greater depth is reached. This means the purchase and erection of more powerful pumping machinery, and also a very considerable annual expense in working. At Reefton there are shafts far deeper than what they are at the Thames, but there is scarcely any water to contend with, and the expense of prospecting is therefore very small in comparison to prospecting the deep levels at the Thames. It may be confidently asserted that nothing less than a capital of £100,000 is of any use to undertake the erection of a pumping plant and the proper testing of the ground. It may be said by some that this work is of too speculative a character, but it must be borne in mind that all mining ventures are to a certain extent speculative; but so far as we have been able to ascertain from deep-mining operations in the Australian Colonies, and the recent discovery of a new lode in the Keep-it-Dark Mine at Reefton, whenever a rich lode has been found on or near the upper levels there is a great probability of other "makes" of stone being found in the same channel of country. In regard to the Keep-it-Dark Mine, rich stone was found on the upper levels, but as the lode was traced down to the 700ft. level it got broken up and not payable for working, and after a considerable amount of prospecting it was at one time thought that the mine would have to be abandoned, when an entirely new block of stone was discovered and sunk on to a depth of 800ft., carrying good gold. There is a great probability that the same thing will take place at the Thames. There is a rich channel of country running from the Kuranui Hill to Shortland, and, although the lodes become broken up as they go down, there has never been any large amount of prospecting work done to see whether new lodes would be found at a greater depth. This could only be done in the past in the claims north of the Big Pump shaft, as the rich auriferous band of country, or, at least, where the rich auriferous stone was found, rises as it goes northwards, and dips considerably towards the Queen of Beauty shaft.

The whole indications point out that the place to sink a deep shaft to test the ground is at the southern end of the field, as there are greater probabilities of finding the continuations of the lodes in the same band or channel of country going southward, and, by driving a level northwards, having cross-cuts at various places, new lodes or "makes" of stone are likely to be found below the level where the upper lodes get broken up. Mr. C. A. Harris is now in England trying to form a company with sufficient capital to prospect the deep levels; but before this can be done a definite arrangement will have to be arrived at amongst the present claimholders as to what concessions they are prepared to offer to a company formed to develop their properties.

It will be seen from the following table that there were 37,909 tons of stone and mullock crushed, and also 10,555 tons of tailings treated, for a yield of 22,809oz. 13dwt. of gold, against 62,444 tons of thus stone, mullock, and tailings crushed for the previous year, which yielded 34,636oz. 19dwt. of gold, showing a decrease in the last year's production of gold of 11,827oz. 6dwt. The number of wagesmen and tributers at work on the field last year were 598, as against 660 for the previous year. This shows conclusively that unless the present claimholders are prepared to offer advantageous terms to those who are willing to invest their capital to develop the field, the present dimensions of the town and also the mining population will dwindle down year by year; people will have to seek fresh fields and pastures new.

The following table shows the comparative results of working the mines in the Thames district for the last financial year as against the previous one:—