

A matter of interest during the year was the discovery of a reef containing gold on the Paparoa Ranges by prospectors named Curtis and Feary, and, in consequence, several claims were pegged off, and an attempt is now being made by Mr. Mills, of Greymouth, to float a company in England to work the whole of the claims. The amount of capital proposed to be invested is £42,000, and no doubt if Mr. Mills is successful in floating the company Brunnerton district will advance.

With reference to the very serious disaster which took place in the Brunner Mine at 9.30 a.m. on Thursday, the 26th March, at the time of the explosion there were sixty-five men and boys in the mine, not one of whom was saved. An inquest was opened on the bodies on Saturday, the 28th March, and adjourned to Thursday next, the 2nd April, and it is generally thought that the cause of the explosion will never be explained. Several of the victims were married (about forty), and have left wives and families, some of whom are in poor circumstances. A relief fund has been started, and it is thought a good deal of money will be collected for the distressed widows and orphans. Through these deaths taking place there will be really no unemployed in this district for some time.

There are six factories registered here under "The Factories Act, 1894," and I have no difficulty in getting the owners to comply with the Act. The Shop-assistants Act is strictly enforced here, but I have very little difficulty in getting the shopkeepers to comply with its regulations.

E. Tregear, Esq.

I have, &c.,

HENRY BEATTIE, Constable.

### GREYMOUTH.

SIR,—

Greymouth, 3rd April, 1896.

The number of men assisted during the past year has been the least since co-operative works were started in this district. The number of unemployed registered was 187; assisted, 60.

The railway co-operative works at Jackson's have been lately handed over to the inspection of the District Agent at Kumara, although, as I made several visits to the works under your instructions, I may be permitted to note a few remarks thereon. Of men employed at the works, twenty-three were sent from this district, the remainder coming from Hokitika, Kumara, Brunner, and Christchurch. A number of the men complain that the price given for the work is totally inadequate. In other cases work is overpaid—that is, it would be if paid according to measurement. It is a common saying among working-men that the co-operative system, properly administered, is a blessing, but that local officers are prejudiced against it owing to the extra amount of work entailed, as against the old contract system, when one contractor alone had to be dealt with. The great difficulty at present in this district is in estimating the value of work by standards which have no local application. It may, perhaps, be advisable that in certain cases at least a week's work should be performed at day labour, under supervision of the overseer, before fixing the value of the contract. In justice to the Government, it should be said that they have sent down an independent expert to inquire into the causes of complaint.

The remaining work on the Grey-Hokitika railway was completed during the year. A new drillshed was erected at Greymouth. A Courthouse at Brunnerton was also established, and new Courthouse built. The stoppage of the harbour-works threw about seventy men out of employment. These have mostly gone out into the country prospecting, or have obtained casual work in the district.

All work in connection with the opening of the Coal Creek Mine has been hung up for some time, pending settlement of freight rates. It is hoped that the Government will compel the company to proceed or cancel their lease, as at present a large outlet for labour is blocked. The disaster at the Brunner Mine has caused much suffering and misery throughout the district. A searching inquiry will doubtless be made by Government to find out whether the regulations in regard to mining have been strictly carried out.

The sawmilling industry, which for nine months of the year averaged about three-quarters of a million feet per week, has, owing to the rise in prices introduced by the newly-formed association, again languished, the timber merchants, anticipating a rise, having bought considerable stocks at old prices. A few of the mills are cutting for the South African market, which, if properly developed, will take the timber as fast as boats can carry it. The trial shipment to the English market was a failure, and it will probably be some time before our sawmillers venture again in the same direction.

The late floods caused a great destruction in the country districts of roads and bridges, which will cost thousands to repair, and should provide work for a number. A new industry in the shape of a dairy factory has been lately started in the Grey Valley, which should be a help to our farming community.

The gold-mining industry, which I noted in my last report as showing signs of revival, has kept on the move, and the hope is now that we are on the eve of a boom which will revolutionise the ways and means of developing a large amount of treasure which undoubtedly lies hidden throughout the Coast. I also, in my last, ventured to prophecy that English capital would soon flow in this direction. An English capitalist has already purchased a large number of mines, and attracted the tide of English capital to these shores. Yet why should it not be possible for the Government to act in a similar manner to these same capitalists, by employing the best mining experts to exploit the country, and by treating the found auriferous deposits in the latest scientific manner, and to reap the great harvest which will ere long enrich lucky shareholders, the majority of whom are absentees.

Again I would urge upon the Government the necessity of assisting our mining associations as an indirect means of solving our "unemployed" problems.

E. Tregear, Esq.

I have, &c.,

WM. H. BOASE, Agent.