

SCHOOLS OF MINES.

The beneficial results attendant on the establishment of these schools continue to be felt in the mining centres. Opportunity is afforded enabling advanced students as well as working miners to acquire knowledge of the various subjects necessary to those desiring to follow up the profession of mining engineers and managers, and also of other subjects required in carrying out all successful mining enterprises. The long-felt need of a higher technical education, combined with practical knowledge of everyday work, in connection with the development of the mineral wealth of the colony has in a marked degree been met, and the interest evinced in the classes is shown by the increased number of students attending the principal schools, and by the desire expressed by the miners for the establishment of schools in districts at a distance from the present centres.

The large number of students coming forward clearly shows it to be a recognised fact that, unless those engaged in mining pursuits wish to be left behind, they must avail themselves of the opportunity for acquiring the scientific knowledge now so necessary to all who desire to become leaders in the conduct of mining enterprises. Well-equipped schools at the chief places, in which a continuous course of instruction is carried on, are infinitely preferable to smaller schools, where the time devoted to teaching is intermittent, and less opportunity afforded for obtaining a thorough knowledge of the subjects forming the groundwork of the necessary studies.

THAMES SCHOOL.

The attendance at this school continued to increase during the year, the average being 103·5 as against 56·5 for the preceding year. The number of assays made—viz., 1,796, as against 1,103 for the preceding year—shows a large increase, whilst seventy-four parcels of ore were treated at the experimental plant, as against forty-five for last year.

There are many advantages consequent on having the school in a central position like the Thames, where all branches of gold-mining are carried on. The scientific treatment of ores by different processes can be readily witnessed, and the Director is in a position to at all times explain matters which otherwise, in the absence of practical illustration, would be more difficult.

The experimental plant in connection with the school is shortly to receive an addition which will place it in a position to be more readily used in treating parcels of ore. The two stamps are to be removed, and a battery of three stamps, suitable either for wet or dry crushing, with a rock-breaker and all the most modern appliances for the scientific treatment of different kinds of ore, is to be erected.

The advantages named in a great measure tend to insure this school maintaining the foremost position in point of attendance and practical results.

Mr. F. B. Allen, M.A., B.Sc., was appointed Director of the school as successor to Mr. James Park, F.G.S., who resigned his appointment during the year. Mr. Allen's position as assistant to Mr. Park enabled him to enter on the duties and follow up the system hitherto adopted in the successful conduct of the school. The following is the report furnished by Mr. Allen on the progress made at the Thames School for the past year:—

I have the honour to report that the year 1896-97 has been an extremely busy and a successful one for the school, which has made exceptional strides, and is now in a flourishing condition.

Consequent on the revival in mining on the peninsula the school has been busily and constantly employed assaying and treating parcels of ore for the public, and has afforded a ready means of ascertaining the value of the numerous new finds which have been made during the past year. Besides this, large numbers of new students, both young men just entering the field of mining and also working miners, have taken advantage of the courses of study at the school, and have been qualifying themselves for the various public examinations, as well as for work in the mines and batteries. The mining students are becoming thoroughly alive to the fact that scientific training will materially assist them in their daily avocations, and enable them, when in charge of works, to develop their mines and carry on the operations connected with the winning of gold to better advantage.

That the amount of public work performed by the school during the past year, as well as the attendance, have practically increased twofold shows that the school has kept pace with the mining revival, and is thoroughly appreciated.

An inspection of the tables accompanying this report will show that the public work and the attendance at the classes rapidly increased from May, 1896, onwards; and, as Mr. James Park, F.G.S., who had so ably directed the school for some seven years, and brought it into an efficient condition, severed his connection with the institution at the end of April, 1896, I was left single-handed to carry on the whole work of the school, just at the time when public assays and battery-work were rapidly increasing, and when new students were entering every week. This entailed very long hours on my part to keep everything in working-order, but after four months an assistant, Mr. P. G. Morgan, M.A., was appointed as Assistant Lecturer and Assayer. This was in September, and since that time he has ably discharged his duties, and has relieved me in great measure from the excessive amount of work entailed by increase in every department of the school.

The average attendance of registered students has increased from 56·5 in 1895-96 to 103 for the year 1896-97, and, as the attendance has continued to progressively increase from the beginning of 1896 up to the present time, it is now far in excess of that of any previous period in the history of the Institution. The assaying classes are, as usual, largely attended, but it is a pleasing and noteworthy fact that in the mining and surveying classes, which are in great part made up of practical miners who attend after their daily work in the mines is over, the increase has also been large. The surveying-class roll shows an increase from twenty-six in 1896 to fifty-three for the first term of 1897, and the mining class an increase from twenty-five to fifty, in each case double that of the preceding year. The school is now taxed to its utmost capacity in finding accommodation for these students.