

*Weather Reporting.*—The daily weather forecasts have, as hitherto, been made and circulated throughout the colony by Captain Edwin. A supply of first-class standard barometers, barographs, and thermometers have been procured from England, and are now being sent to the most important stations.

*Examination of Masters, Mates, and Engineers.*—One hundred and ninety-six candidates passed their examinations for certificates of competency, and ninety-one failed. Of those who passed, 161 were masters, mates, and engineers of sea-going vessels, and thirty-five were masters and engineers of steamships plying within restricted limits. Five certificates of service were issued. The new regulations for the examination of masters and mates, under which the examinations are more difficult than formerly, came into force on the 1st January last, and since that date there has been a falling-off in the number of candidates who have presented themselves for examination. Captain Robertson, one of the Examiners at Auckland, has resigned, in consequence of leaving the colony, and Captain Adamson has been appointed in his place.

*Coastal Surveys.*—Sunken rocks which were not marked on the chart having been reported to exist off Codfish Island and Paterson's Inlet, Stewart Island, Captain Neale, of the *Hinemoa*, surveyed the localities, and, having found the rocks, their positions have been reported to the Hydrographer to the Admiralty, in order that the necessary corrections may be made in the chart. Captain Fairchild has examined the coast near the mouth of the Owaru River, south of the Kaikoura Peninsula, where he found an excellent boat-harbour, of which he has furnished the department with a plan. A survey has been made of the coast off Akaroa Head, where it was reported that the water had shoaled, and the result has been reported to the Admiralty. The locality in which the s.s. "*Tasmania*" was wrecked has also been surveyed, in consequence of the master of that vessel reporting that he had struck on an unknown rock outside the danger-line. This survey was carried out by Captain Neale, of the "*Hinemoa*," and Mr. Armstrong, of the Survey Department, whose report shows that the Admiralty chart was practically correct, and that the vessel must have struck inside the danger-line.

*Government Steamers.*—The "*Tutanekai*" has laid a new cable across Cook Strait and repaired one of the old ones. She proved an excellent vessel for the work, which was carried out without hitch of any kind. In July last she went over to Sydney for the Governor, Lord Ranfurly, and brought him to Wellington. In addition to the above work, she has been employed in carrying railway-sleepers, locomotives, and other railway plant from one port to another.

The "*Hinemoa*" has been mainly engaged on the work of conveying oil and stores to the lighthouses, overhauling and cleaning harbour buoys, and in visiting the southern islands and the Kermadec Islands for the purpose of looking for castaways and inspecting the provision depots. Captain C. F. Post was appointed master of the vessel on Captain Neale leaving her to take up the position of Harbourmaster at Manukau.

*Wrecks and Casualties.*—A table showing the analysis of casualties to shipping is appended hereto. Those on the coasts of the colony numbered forty-eight, representing 20,357 tons, as against sixty, representing 22,058 tons, in the previous year. The number of total wrecks within the colony, including a sailing-vessel which foundered after collision, was six, of 3,302 tons, as against nine, of 1,450 tons, in the previous year. The number of lives lost was twenty-eight, as against fifteen in 1896-97. Of these twenty-seven were on or near the coasts of the colony—viz., twelve from the "*Zuleika*," thirteen from the s.s. "*Tasmania*," and one each from the "*Clematis*" and "*Maud Graham*." The life lost beyond the colony was the result of an accident to a greaser employed in the refrigerating-engine room of the s.s. "*Fifeshire*."

*Survey of Steamers.*—The report of the Engineer Surveyor on the work of the survey of steamers is appended hereto. There is now a large number of vessels in the colony provided with oil-engines, and these are required to be surveyed in the same way as steamships are surveyed; but the question as to whether they should be required to carry certificated engineers is under consideration. As there are large numbers of this class of vessels in the United States of America, the department has procured a copy of the United States law on the subject, from which it appears that they are there treated in the same way as steamships, both as regards survey and the engineers they are required to carry. The s.s. "*Invercargill*" having carried more passengers than allowed by her certificate, proceedings were taken against the owner, and he was fined £2, and 2s. 6d. for each passenger carried in excess of the proper number. The administration of the Inspection of Machinery Acts has been placed under the control of this department from the 1st instant, but, as it was under the Public Works Department during last financial year, the report of the Chief Inspector for that period has been furnished to that department.

*Wages and Effects of Deceased Seamen.*—The estates of twenty-six seamen, amounting to £257 12s. 1d., were dealt with during the year. Of these, twelve were new estates. The sum of £176 15s. 10d. was paid to relatives and other claimants, and the sum of £76 6s. 3d., being the amount of unclaimed estates which had been in the hands of the department for more than six years, was paid into the Public Account.

*Engagement and Discharge of Seamen.*—The question of the appointment of master mariners as Shipping Masters at the four principal ports has been carefully considered, but as it would appear that the advantage that would be gained by such appointments would not justify the expenditure that they would necessitate it has been decided to continue the present system, under which the Collectors of Customs perform the duties. Mr. Bollons, chief officer of the s.s. "*Tutanekai*," has been appointed Shipping Clerk at the Wellington Customhouse, but this appointment will entail very little additional expenditure, as the former Shipping Clerk will perform ordinary Customs work at another port. Proceedings were taken against Captain J. Crawford, of the s.s. "*Huia*," for not having reported the engagement and discharge of certain seamen to the Customs for the purpose of getting the transactions ratified. A fine of £1 and costs was imposed. Proceedings were also taken against Mr. J. C. Cooper, of Wellington, for procuring employment for a seaman without a