

A most encouraging sign for the future is that at the greatest depths yet attained in any of the mines there is as large a proportion of free gold as there was in the upper levels; and there has been no change of country in depth.

With one or two exceptions, mine-managers throughout the field have shown a willingness to comply with the Mining Regulations, but there is still much room for improvement in the ventilation of the deep mines, in all of which only the bare standard quantity of air required by law is maintained. There is not a mechanical ventilator in use in the whole Reefton district, and in this respect the managers are displaying a lamentable ignorance of the best modern mining practice.

The contract system of stoping is now being given a trial, and while some of the old mine-managers are of opinion that it will not be successful in the very heavy ground, the experiment will be watched with interest.

A large number of minor accidents have been reported, but few serious ones, and none fatal.

Payments under the Gold-miners' Relief Fund have amounted for minor accidents to £141 8s. 5d.; and for total incapacity owing to miners' disease, £350, while two widows whose husbands died of this disease received the sum of £50 each, with £12 and £20 funeral expenses respectively. Authorities on the subject of this complaint are all agreed that the chief causes thereof are the inhalation of dust-particles and the continued breathing of humid and vitiated air. Since the general introduction of machine drills, the use of water-sprays while drilling is in progress is a step towards the removal of the first cause, but there is still room for improvement in this respect by extending the use of water so that no material shall be handled in a dry state however it may have been broken, and that there shall be no dust allowed to accumulate in travelling-ways. No attempt to provide miners with an ample supply of cool fresh air has yet been made, and, as mentioned above, even the deepest mines (from 1,200 ft. to 2,000 ft.) are still solely dependent on the out-of-date, unreliable, and generally unsatisfactory method of natural ventilation, poor at the best, and varying with every variation of the weather. The gold-mining industry has paid the sum of £482 on account of miners' disease during the year, and it is certain that it has lost more than this in the low standard of work attained by men who are not physically fit. Yet, while other fields in the Dominion and every other mining country have adopted modern and efficient methods of ventilation, the Reefton district lags behind, and the results are seen in the prevalence of miners' disease, a low standard of work, and a widespread feeling of dissatisfaction on the part of employees.

Alluvial Mining.

Alluvial mining is slowly becoming a past industry, the more accessible and easily worked deposits having become exhausted. There are still, however, considerable possibilities in some of the immense low-grade deposits on the West Coast. These will undoubtedly be worked on a large scale some day, as there is in nearly every case ample water-supply available. The expenditure of a large amount of capital will be required, but the deposits are so large and the gold-contents apparently so regular that there is every reason to believe that a profitable industry will result.

ACCIDENTS.

Fatal.

18th March—At Smeaton Syndicate's dredge, George Roberts, engineer, was caught in the elevator-shaft, and killed.

Serious.

15th July—At the Keep-it-Dark Mine, James Ulrich, miner, had small bone of ankle broken by a fall of stone.

12th January—At the Progress Mine, James Wicken, miner, had ribs broken and received bruises by a fall of stone.

MR. A. H. RICHARDS, INSPECTOR OF MINES, HOKITIKA.

PETROLEUM.

The *Kotuku Oilfields (Limited)*, during the year, installed a large drill, which, after three months' trial, was transported elsewhere, as it was found to be too heavy for local requirements. Boring operations have not been resumed upon this property, which is situated near Lake Brunner.

QUARTZ-MINING.

Poerua District.

Poerua Gold-mining Company.—The operations of this company were confined to the development of their mine, consisting of crosscutting, driving, rising, and sinking on the lode. I found during my inspection that the timbering and ventilation of the mine were satisfactory. There is now being installed a treatment plant consisting of a ten-stamp mill, two Fraser grinding-pans, and one berdan, together with a cyanide plant. The whole of this machinery will be driven by water-power.

Wilberforce District.

Owing to the inclemency of the weather work during the early part of the year was rendered impossible, as these claims are situated towards the summit of the Southern Alps, near Browning's Pass. No mining operations have been carried out subsequently.

South Westland.

Alluvial mining is almost abandoned on the South Westland beaches. Only a few aged men and Maoris occasionally work the beach sands when circumstances permit.