

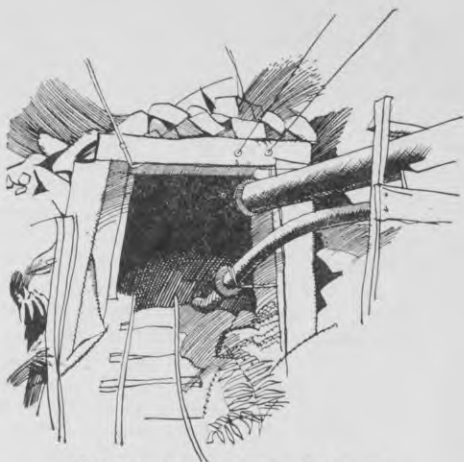
come from other sources. But that doesn't stop the conviction that there's still gold in them there hills, more gold than ever came out of them; it doesn't lessen the eager hope of its discovery.

A bush wilderness jealously guarded against pakeha intrusion by its Native owners, Thames district before 1867 was hardly known and not bothered with. Three thousand and more miners had rushed the Coromandel in 1852, arrangements had been made with the Maoris, but disappointing returns and the counter attraction of other fields in the South Island soon led to its desertion. In 1861 there was fresh activity; after two years' sluicing, metal valued at £11,000 was recovered. Death in the night, the daytime too—the Waikato War, 1863. The Maoris of the district took part, the Coromandel field was again deserted. And still no eyes, no thoughts, were turned towards Thames.

"Many men classed as labourers are starving for bread, for work that will buy that bread." It's a sentence from a report describing the conditions in Auckland during the economic depression of 1867-69. The removal of the seat of government to Wellington, the withdrawal of the Imperial troops after the Waikato War, left business stagnant; bankruptcies were frequent, unemployment figures high. Work had to be found. The Provincial Government made arrangements with the Maori landowners for prospecting the Thames

creeks—£5,000 was offered as reward for the discovery of a payable goldfield. Signs of gold were found, nuggets, payable quantities. The news quickly spread. August 1 the day, 1867 the year, that the Thames district was officially proclaimed a goldfield.

Five bob with a pint of beer



*Entrance to the Sylvia Gold-mine.*

thrown in. That was the cost of the trip by steamer. Decks were crowded, a ship a day wasn't enough. The rush was on.

Disappointment was the first reaction, dissatisfaction the second. On the first few days prospectors returned from territory which has since made fortunes, wanted back the £1 they had paid for their mining rights. The blocks of land in which prospecting was allowed by the Maoris were limited; in the early days the commissioner of the field, his assistant, and two policemen were kept busy investigating Native complaints, bringing back from forbidden territory the trespassers who were not satisfied with what was available. Quarrels broke out, at times a serious disturbance was feared. But gold was trickling in.

Within three years there was a population estimated at 20,000. Fortunes had been made—and lost. Canvastown, the hundreds of bell-tents, had been replaced by wooden buildings, by houses that were dismantled in Auckland and re-erected in Thames. Companies had been formed, the capital found, mining tramways, roads, and wharf accommodation provided by the Provincial Government. In 1868, 11,585 miners' rights were issued; in 1869, 9,438; in 1870, 33,296.

Some of the returns were phenomenal. The Caledonian, the mine to make the richest strike, crushed thousands of



*Fire Bell and Siren.*