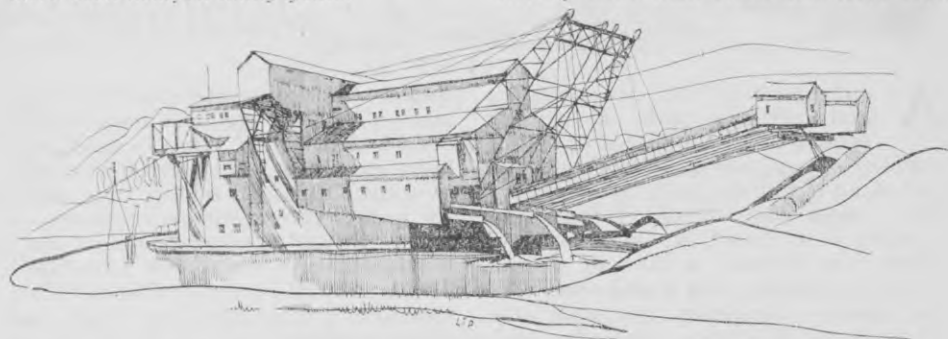


close at hand and able to be mined without difficulty, were some compensation; and with the coming of the gold-dredging boom in the early "seventies," in a country so entirely destitute of forests or native vegetation suitable for fuel, this lignite was of inestimable value not only for domestic use, but also for supplying the motive power without which the evolution of the modern dredge would have been delayed many years.

be enlarged, more men employed, and production increased considerably, without difficulty; against this, however, are chances of labour troubles, and more important, uncertainty of demand after the war for lignite coal in a country with plentiful supplies of higher-grade bituminous coals. Research into coal utilization overseas, and in New Zealand to a limited extent, may give the answer; already more than 2,000 uses have been



This river dredge, which works a few miles from Cromwell, uses one-third of the entire output of an electric-power station. Its gold returns vary from 50 oz. a week to 500 oz. Forty hands are employed.

The road to the Cairnmuir Coal-mine runs through a desert; on each side stretch expanses of fine white sand growing only an occasional thistle and supporting nothing but an odd discouraged-looking rabbit. Ridges of sand are heaped over the road. Everything is as dry as dust, and looking as thirsty. As far as can be seen there is nothing green or even a discoloured brown, no grass-blade or tree-leaf. (This is Wild West, you think. Every minute you expect a Mexican to pop up from behind a cactus, or a Tom Mix film director from behind a megaphone.) The mine is in a valley which for about eighty years has been torn and bitten into by shafts; as the coal has been exhausted, or as continued operation has become either too difficult or too expensive, new infiltrations have been made. The present working is cornered snugly into the hillside, and each day the gang of five men bring to the surface and send to the railhead at Cromwell between 20 and 30 tons of a high-grade lignite.

According to the manager, fields in the area are extensive. The mine could

found for coal, and such research is in its infancy. Already it has been found that the coal from the Cairnmuir Mine will produce 80 gallons of petrol to the ton. One day, perhaps, coal-mining in Otago Central will again be as profitable and active as it was in the days of the gold dredges.

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On the opposite bank of the Kawarau River from which Cromwell is built rises a large plateau which is as flat as an air strip and which is as dry and parched as most of the rest of unirrigated Otago Central. Rabbits live there, nothing else. Several years ago a scheme was devised to lift water from the river to the rich soil of the plateau and to plant a large orchard. A suspension bridge, costing £1,000, was built across the river. But the scheme fell through. There now are the bridge, the rabbits, two fig-trees, and one almond-tree. Nothing else remains. Heaped along the banks of the river, stretching in from the water for fifteen yards or more, are high hills of stones the size of pumpkins and as smooth; it's not, as you may imagine in the heat, that the earth in the intensity of the sun has been