

The condition of the Brunner Coal Mine, with regard to pillar-working, has recently claimed special attention. The question of dealing with this matter under "The Westland and Nelson Coal Fields Administration Act, 1877," had long before been the subject of correspondence with the Commissioner of Crown Lands at Nelson; and, as notices had been given by both Messrs. Cox and Binns, and the latter had exhausted all ordinary means of bringing about a cessation of indiscriminate pillar-working in this mine, without success, it was considered expedient, in order to deal effectually with the matter, to appoint him an inspector under the Act above referred to, and this was accordingly carried out upon the recommendation of the Nelson Land Board, in February last, Mr. Binns being also appointed an inspector under the lease of the Brunner Mine. These special powers had the desired effect, and, after somewhat protracted negotiation, the pillar-working ceased on the 10th of March, and it has not been continued since.

It will be seen that the reports of the Shag Point Mine (the condition of which was last year the subject of much consideration) are much more satisfactory this year; and that the Kaitangata Mine, in which the great explosion occurred shortly before the Act was brought into operation, is now reported to be most carefully managed, and in a satisfactory condition, every possible precaution apparently being taken to avoid danger, especially in view of the fact that the presence of gas is still occasionally observed in this mine.

During the year, in consequence of their increasing importance, inspection under the Regulation of Mines Act has been extended to the principal quartz mines at Reefton, Boatman's, and Lyell, copies of the Act having been forwarded from this office to the managers and legal managers with a notification of intention to bring the mines under the operation of the Act after a visit from an inspector. This was followed by an inspection of these mines (ten in all) by Mr. Binns, whose report upon this subject is published in the appendix. These are the preliminary steps which have been taken to place these mines under official control and inspection, and the process will be continued with due consideration for the managers' presumed recent knowledge of the Act, but with the ultimate object of bringing these mines as effectually under its operation with reference to precautions for safety, as the coal mines. They are the first gold mines which have been brought under this Act; those at the Thames and adjoining districts, as I have stated in former reports, being inspected by Mr. McLaren, under "The Gold Mining Districts Act, 1873," his reports upon these being published with the annual report upon the gold fields.

STATISTICS. D

The development of our coal mines is a subject of deep interest to all who are concerned in the welfare of the country, and it is one which must increase in importance as the manufacturing interest becomes established and extended. In this colony especially, with an almost unlimited supply of splendid raw materials of various kinds at hand waiting to be fabricated into articles of commerce, the coal question demands superlative attention, and it is now engaging the earnest consideration of many persons and bodies, either interested in the progress of manufactures or in the coal trade itself.

The number of coal mines placed upon the list this year shows three less than last year, owing to some small mines in the South Island having been struck off the list, and a lesser number of new ones being noted in their place, and to the Miranda Mine, in the North Island, having ceased working. The number of coal mines now recorded are five in the North and ninety-nine in the South Island; but, as I pointed out in last year's report, many of those in the South Island are upon a very small scale, and are only noted because they are considered of sufficient importance to require inspection, the larger mines in operation included in the list being easily distinguished by the number of men employed, and other particulars given. The usual tabular statement containing these particulars, and the total output from the various coal mines for the year 1881, and also the approximate total output from the coal mines in the colony to the end of 1881, will be found in Return No. 1 following the appendix. The statement furnished