

COAL FIELDS.

For some years past the coal fields of the colony have been left to private enterprise, the only relation which Government has maintained to them being that of their control and inspection under the regulations of "The Mines Act, 1874."

The report of the Secretary for Mines, dated the 20th June, 1884 (Parliamentary Paper, C.-5), is already in the hands of members, and shows that this most essential industry is slowly but surely increasing in importance.

Thus, during the last six years, while the total consumption of coal in the colony has increased 75 per cent., the proportion which the coal raised in the colony bears to the imported coal has increased from 48 per cent. in 1878 to 77 per cent. in 1883.

I regret to say, however, that a marked falling-off in production has been experienced in the case of the Kawakawa Mine, at the Bay of Islands, on which the northern part of the colony has for many years been chiefly dependent for its supply of steam coal. Any permanent failure of this mine would be a serious loss to the colony, as the expensive railway that has been made to connect it with a deep-water wharf would become in that case unproductive. From the reports of the Geological Department there appears, however, to be good ground for expecting that the falling-off is only one of the fluctuations incident to the development of all coal fields, and it is anticipated that a more active and extended use of the diamond drill in the district will lead to the discovery of fresh coal seams.

A similar failure was experienced in the case of the important Springfield Mine, from which Christchurch is largely supplied; but in that case the company procured a diamond drill, and the result of its use in discovering new coal seams on the property has been very successful.

There is no doubt that in the diamond drill, if it is used with judgment, we have a means of placing the development of our coal mines on a solid basis, by obtaining, without expensive shafts, accurate records of the thickness and nature of the coal measures.

The principal areas occupied by coal measures, concerning the extent and value of which more exact information is required, are the following:—

In the North Island.—The Bay of Islands District, the district at the source of the Waipa and the Mokau Rivers, and the lower Mokau District, where seams of valuable steam coal are known to exist, and probably to extend into the upper district of the Wanganui River.

In the South Island.—The area of coal formation on the Paparoa Range, north of Greymouth, and the country from Reefton to the sources of the Buller River, require more definite exploration, similar to that which the Mount Rochfort Coal Field has received. The fact that large coal deposits exist in the above district has been ascertained, but the determination of their exact extent and value might have an important bearing on the great question of the most advantageous way of improving the facilities for export trade from the West Coast, and also on the best lines for internal communication.

There can scarcely be any doubt that if the colony could afford to give substantial encouragement towards the employment of diamond drills by coal companies and private persons much good would ensue. Good results would also accrue to the colony, and considerable sums of money would be saved to companies and individuals, were there a more liberal expenditure on the Geological Department, which at present receives a very small vote.

PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE.

The proposals I am about to make are based on principles which, after long discussion with my colleagues, I have decided on submitting to the House as the foundation of our future public works policy. There are two points which we must bear distinctly in mind:—