

10,849,261oz., representing a value of £42,566,135; while the separate return for last year gives 233,068oz. obtained, of the value of £931,628, full details of which may be seen on Table No. 4 appended.

It is acknowledged that at least one million and a quarter pounds have been paid to the State by way of gold duty to dispense to the local bodies, and that the State has been greatly benefited indirectly in its fiscal revenue by the large consumption of dutiable commodities made by an enterprising, yet a distinct, class of colonists, whose occupation is mining. If, then, the colony were to fail at any time in offering facilities and encouragement to these worthy citizens of the mines, I feel assured that those among them who might be in a position to do so would leave the country for new fields abroad. For these reasons, therefore, I venture to think that I have shown to honourable gentlemen sufficient to cause them to hesitate before acting in any way that might tend to embarrass or cripple the industry.

The total quantity of quartz crushed during the past year was 94,016 tons, which yielded 111,432oz. of gold; while the quantity crushed during the previous year was 92,872 tons, which produced 88,299oz. of gold: thus showing in this branch of gold-mining a satisfactory increase in favour of last year of 23,133oz., full details of which may be found in Table 5. I look upon this improvement as particularly interesting; it gives evidence that quartz-mining—to my mind the future permanent gold- and silver-mining of the colony—is steadily increasing in many parts of New Zealand; and, although its development heretofore has been slow, its future importance and value to the colony are already assured.

MINING POPULATION AND EARNINGS.

Let me now call attention to the number of miners in active pursuit of their calling at our many goldfields on the 31st March last. As may be seen on Table 6, there were 11,178, while the miners similarly engaged during the previous year were 12,034. In respect to the number of men—and there were 856 less—which those figures show, and a consequent decrease of labour-power, it is satisfactory to find that the gold-product for the same period has increased. Of the number of miners following their avocation, 2,105 are engaged entirely in quartz-mining, as against 2,059 employed at similar work during the year previous. After careful observation I have come to the conclusion that quartz-mining is every year receiving more attention from the practical miner than alluvial digging, and there is no doubt about the average earnings of the quartz-miner being greater than those of the alluvial miner. For instance, the average earnings of miners on our goldfields last year appear equal to £80 5s. 5d. per miner, or £3 15s. per man more than for the previous year; but to those of my friends engaged in quartz-reefing—comparing the value of gold obtained from such workings against the number of men employed—the average earnings of each will amount to £185 5s. 5d.

QUARTZ-MINING.

Sir, it is my duty to direct attention to some of the principal quartz-mining companies now in operation in this colony, and among the foremost in importance are the following:—

The Cambria Company, at the Thames, with a nominal capital of £31,500, of which only £1,837 10s., are at the present time paid up. Yet, with this bagatelle sum paid up, the company has been enabled since January, 1884, to amass and declare dividends amounting to the respectable total of £69,260.

The Phoenix Company, at Skipper's, in Otago, the property of Mr. Bullen, of Marlborough, has recently struggled into a healthy state of existence after many years of lavish nourishment having been bestowed upon it by its faithful owner, who has determinedly for nearly twenty years endeavoured to prove the faith that was in him, that he possessed a very rich mine. After expending many thousands of pounds, and taking out of the mine some 15,000oz. of gold, the mine now promises to pay regularly and handsomely. This property particularly shows an instance where confidence in quartz-reefing and its value in the future has not been misplaced. It will perhaps be interesting to honourable gentlemen to ask their attention to the mode of working adopted at this mine. By the means of electricity the fundamental operations of the mine are set in motion and carried on, the details of which are fully set forth on page 19 of the report by the Inspecting Engineer.

Of some of the more prominent companies of the west coast of the Middle Island, I may mention the Welcome and Keep It Dark Mines, at Reefton, which are the principal dividend-paying properties in that district, and the Alpine Mine, in the Lyell district; particulars of which may be gathered from pages 35 and 37 of the Inspecting Engineer's report.