

Waikaia—formerly Switzer's—is another important alluvial-mining centre; but, unfortunately, the claims are chiefly held by Chinese—certainly the best claims are, and all the water-rights. The quantity of gold obtained last year from this field, as far as can be ascertained, is 2,064oz.; but I have little doubt a great deal is still in the hands of the Chinese. The number of these people employed as miners on our goldfields last year was 3,134; and at a moderate calculation I think they must have obtained fully one-sixth of the whole quantity of gold produced during that period. They contribute very little comparatively to the revenue of the colony, while the most of the gold they succeed in obtaining they carry or send to their own country.

Knowing, as I do, how easily any steady worker, not necessarily a miner, can put together six to eight shillings per day on many of our alluvial goldfields by simply using a tin dish or an old cradle, and washing the alluvial drift found near the beds of the watercourses, I often wonder that there should be people in this country unemployed. I feel sure that if they would turn their attention from the large towns and centres of population and wend their way to some of our goldfields they would soon find how easily and independently they were enabled to make a good livelihood and enjoy an unlimited range of freedom of existence.

In respect to all alluvial mines it will be found that any details to which I have omitted to refer may be seen in the reports attached, by the Inspecting Engineer and the several Wardens.

COAL-MINES.

Second in importance to no branch of mining in New Zealand is that of coal, and it is most gratifying to find that our coal-mines are year by year making steady and sure progress. In 1878 our total output was 162,218 tons; while in 1884, a period of seven years—inclusive—it had reached 480,831 tons. The total production from our coal-mines last year, ending 31st December, was 511,063 tons, and the quantity imported 130,202 tons: making a total of 641,265 tons. Of this quantity I find that 51,427 tons are shown in the Customs returns as exports; but, in reality, 45,056 tons of the quantity were used for coaling the direct steamers for England, while 4,000 tons were used by the "Coptic" when war with Russia was threatened, thus making a total of 49,056 tons, the whole of which may be considered as having been consumed within the colony. The exports, therefore, of coal to markets outside of New Zealand during last year were only 2,371 tons, while the actual consumption within it was 638,894 tons; and of this quantity 124,286 tons were imported. The consumption for the year 1884 was 622,921 tons, which shows an increased demand for last year of 15,973 tons. The quantity of coal imported during 1884 appears at 148,444 tons; while last year exhibits a decrease of 18,242 tons: leaving a total of 130,202 tons imported during 1885.

I cannot help expressing extreme regret that, at this period of the colony's history, our exports of coal to other countries should only amount to a few hundred tons, when, had the question of improving the West Coast harbours of Greymouth and Westport been taken into consideration at the time of the initiation of the public works scheme, and dealt with in a practical manner, as was done during the session of 1884, these harbours would long ere this have admitted vessels capable of carrying from two to three thousand tons of coal on one bottom; and, instead of the trifling export that is now being sent away, tens of thousands of tons would be exported annually, not alone to our neighbouring colonies, but also to other countries more distant; and I do not hesitate in predicting that the progressive export of coal from this colony annually in the future will be such as will place the status of New Zealand in respect to its total export of this commodity upon an equal footing with other portions of Australasia, where the effects of trade hitherto have placed them in an advantageous position in respect to the export of coal. I feel, Sir, that I cannot lay too much stress on the importance of nourishing our great coal industry, both in regard to the advancement of colonization and concurrently with it the sound progress of New Zealand financially in respect to its future revenues.

I will now take the average increase of output from our coal-mines during the last eight years, which appears to be 49,835 tons per annum; while the decrease in coal imported for the same period shows 6,278 tons per annum. Although our producing-capacity under existing circumstances is enlarging itself rapidly, the present supply is far from sufficient to meet the demands within the colony. Numerous industries are quickly springing up, requiring an increased supply of fuel. Machinery of many kinds is constantly being erected in different parts of the colony the motive-power of which is steam, and therefore with us coal may be justly termed "the great motor of many industries."