

REEFTON SCHOOL.

The Director of this school (Mr. R. M. Aitken) reports as follows:—

Having resigned my position as Director of the Reefton School of Mines, I have the honour to report on the work done at the school during the past nine months ending 31st December, 1898.

Although the classes were kept going constantly throughout the year, and students given every chance of instruction, I regret to say that the attendance was not good. The students do not come to the various classes regularly, which so interferes with the work that it is almost impossible to show any good results.

There is not the slightest doubt that the school has not received the support from the Reefton public which it deserves, but at the same time the closing of the school would cause great inconvenience to many, and I think, even though classes are discontinued, the laboratory should be kept open for the benefit of prospectors and others.

Classes in the following subjects have been held:—

Mining and Mathematics.—This class, although at one time the most popular, was not so well attended as last year. The instruction given is most useful to those connected with mining operations, and those who generally attend are desirous of obtaining certificates as mine-managers, engine-drivers, &c.

Land- and Mine-surveying.—The work done was all theoretical, owing to the want of instruments. The attendance was poor, about the same as mining and mathematics. A knowledge of surveying is most important to those engaged in mining, and a little practical work would no doubt have kept the class together.

Practical and Theoretical Chemistry.—These are subjects which all assayers and metallurgists should have a knowledge of, especially those connected with the treatment of ores. The attendance during the past year was poor.

Assaying and Metallurgy.—These classes were fairly well attended, but the want of chemicals and apparatus did not give it much chance of improving. When the school is depending on the small fees charged it is difficult to keep up the stock. The work done was similar to that of previous years.

Reefton School.—There have been no improvements added to the school during the past year, as the members' and students' fees have been so small, and the school has had to exist on the test fees, &c.

The methods of crushing and preparing samples for assay with the present appliances take a lot of time and labour, and could be greatly improved on. A good assay-balance is urgently needed if it is intended to carry on the school, as in many cases fine work is required, and accurate returns must be given.

Examinations.—Very few of our students have competed at the annual examinations, but those who did sit obtained high percentages and did good work. During the eight years and a half I have been instructor no less than thirty-eight students have successfully passed the Government examinations for first-class mine-managers, twenty-four under the Mining Act and fourteen under the Coal-mines Act. Most of these now hold good positions as mine-managers. Many others have been successfully prepared for engine-drivers' and other examinations.

The Laboratory.—In this department there has always been a fair amount of work to be done, a lot of which is done free of charge, so as to encourage prospectors to have stone tested in a proper manner. During the past nine months 422 assays and analyses have been performed, made up as follows: Fire-assays, 354; amalgamation tests, 3; bullion assays and meltings, 30; cyanide tests, 30; analyses ores and coals, 5.

The following list will show the number of tests and assays I have made at the Reefton School of Mines during the eight years and a half I have been in charge: Fire-assays, 2,414; berdan amalgamation tests, 255; bullion assays and smeltings, 117; cyanide tests, 150; analyses ores and coals, 52; assays other metals, &c., 74; total, 3,062.

The above is evidence of the amount of work done in this department, and shows that people now recognise the necessity of having their samples tested in a proper manner. In all the testing and assaying great care has always been taken, and the school now enjoys the reputation of furnishing accurate and thoroughly reliable returns. Of course, assayers are frequently blamed for mistakes, but in most cases the fault lies with the person who takes the samples, and unless the sample is properly taken the assay is not only worthless, but misleading.

Had a small testing-plant been erected it would no doubt have been well supported in the past, for on many occasions I have been asked to treat large samples.

This being my final report, I think it my duty to point out the conditions under which I have had to carry on this school during the past two years and a half, which have been anything but favourable. The total amount received for members' and students' fees during the above period was about £40, while the test-fees amounted to over £230. The usual Government subsidies were not applied for by the secretary, although proper balance-sheets, &c., were prepared.

The annual meeting of subscribers was not held last year, and the Committee did not meet during the past nine months, until there was some talk of closing the school, after I had resigned my position.

Where so little interest is taken in the affairs of the school, and the necessary funds are not available, you can quite understand that it is impossible for any one to carry on the work and classes to advantage.

Should the school be closed it will simply mean to undo the work that has already been done; so I hope in the future that the public will subscribe more liberally and support an institution which should be in every important mining district.

Having accepted an engagement under a mining company in this district, I shall be only too pleased to render whatever assistance I am able in carrying on the classes, &c., and shall continue to take the same interest in the school as I have done in the past.