

ACCIDENTS AND FATALITIES

11th January.—Thomas Wilson, jun., employed at his father's coal-pit, near the banks of the Kawarau River, at Bannockburn, was drowned in the river. The coal from the pit is sent across the river in bags by means of a rope tramway. This tramway was also used by deceased when going to and from work. It is supposed he missed his hold of the cage, and fell into the river.

19th January.—Patrick Atkinson, employed at Cairns's pit, Kurow, was caught by a haulage-rope and carried some distance. He fell off and got a few bruises and a severe shake.

18th March.—An ignition of gas took place at Kaitangata Colliery by which four men were slightly burned. I inspected the place at the earliest opportunity, and found the accident happened in a prospecting drive. The men employed in the drive all worked with safety-lamps, a lamp-station being established at the outbye end of the drive. Coal had been struck in the drive a few days previously, and on the day in question the deputy went in to supervise and assist in extending the brattice. To do this, a short length of temporary brattice had to be taken down first, and, as a natural consequence, a little gas accumulated at the face. Just at this time the trucker came in with a truck, and he had carelessly omitted to leave his open light at the lamp-station, coming in with a naked light (instead of a safety-lamp), which he carried on his cap. On his reaching the face, the gas ignited at his light, and he, together with the deputy and two other men, received slight burns. A fifth man who was present escaped unhurt. The company took out a summons against the trucker for violation of Special Rule 74, but the man left the district in a hurry; consequently the summons could not be served.

15th July.—Frederick Loader, coal-miner, Allandale Colliery, had a small ankle-bone fractured by a piece of roof falling on him, and was off work for over three months.

10th November.—William Burt, employed at Shag Point Colliery, when turning a box on a flat-sheet, omitted to hook the chain to the box. The box commenced to run down hill, knocking Burt against a prop, breaking his collar-bone. I inspected the place and inquired into the accident on the 14th November.

11th November.—Alexander Forest, a coal-miner at Burnweil Colliery, Lovell's Flat, was severely hurt by a fall of coal from the face. The place in which Forest was working was a new one, just starting from the side of a brow, and there was abundance of timber set. A "slip" (or false back) crosses the place where he was working in an oblique direction, and, the coal being naturally proud and subject to bumps, a large piece of coal bounded by the slip referred to, burst out from the face, knocking Forest down, and injuring him severely.

There have been a few other accidents of a minor character throughout the district, but none (other than those above referred to) call for notice.

GENERAL.

In the interests of the colony, I am not at all satisfied with the way in which the pits in many parts of Otago are worked; but so long as numerous leases of small area are granted in districts where the consumption is comparatively small, I do not see how it is possible that any improvement can take place. These small mines work close to the outcrop, are in many instances run without proper coal-mining engineering knowledge at cut-throat prices, and a large percentage of coal, which under proper management and concentration of operations could be worked, becomes irrecoverably lost. Every ton so lost is a national loss, and, to my mind, the question is one of serious importance as regards the future.

I am pleased to report that the system adopted last year for the collection of the mine-owners' contributions to the Coal-miners' Relief Fund is working very satisfactorily, and there are now no arrears to the 31st December, 1898.

At several small mines where underground work is carried on no plans of the workings have hitherto been kept, and in out-of-the-way places the owners said they could not afford the expense of bringing a surveyor from a distance. As these mines are mostly, if not altogether, on Crown lands, and it is important that a record should be kept of what is done underground, the Hon. Minister of Mines has authorised me to survey such mines at my inspections, and to supply the owners with a copy of the plan at a nominal rate.

I have, &c.,

JOHN HAYES,

Inspector of Mines.

The Under-Secretary for Mines, Wellington.