

SCHOOLS OF MINES.

The technical instruction imparted at the various schools of mines throughout the colony is still taken advantage of by a large number of students, notwithstanding the falling-off in the attendance at Reefton and the Thames Schools as compared with that of the preceding year.

The permanent character of operations which have been carried on in several of the mining centres will, however, in the future maintain a more numerous and settled population, and considerable numbers of students will be enabled to take advantage of the technical and practical instruction afforded at the different schools. The present indications point to a continuation of the attendance, and the success of these institutions, which have already done so much for the students in the various fields is assured. Many of the ex-students now occupy leading positions as mine-managers and battery-superintendents, not only in New Zealand, but in many parts of the Australian Colonies and Tasmania.

The schools at which regular classes have been held are the Thames, Waihi, and Coromandel, in the North Island; Westport and Reefton, in the West Coast District of the Middle Island; and Otago University, at Dunedin.

The serious depreciation in the attendance and general lack of interest evinced in connection with the work carried on at the Reefton School for some time past induced the Government to obtain a special report on the condition of affairs; and on the resignation of Mr. R. M. Aitken, who was Director of the school since its inception, it was decided not to reappoint a Director, and that future operations must be carried on under the management of the local committee, subsidies being granted on similar lines to those given to the newly established schools in the Hauraki district.

The school at Nelson is conducted by Mr. Worley, one of the teachers, and is in conjunction with the Central State School. There are other schools, at Kuaotunu and Karangahake, in the North Island, where instruction is imparted at intervals by voluntary instructors and members of the committees; whilst at Denniston, Boatman's, Kumara, and Ross, on the west coast of the Middle Island, and at Miller's Flat and Waipori, in Otago, active work has not been carried on for some time past.

Full particulars are given in the several annual reports which follow:—

THAMES SCHOOL.

Mr. F. B. Allen, M.A., B.Sc., Director of the Thames School of Mines, reports as follows:—

The school has had a busy and successful year, and, although the total number of individual students was less than during the preceding twelve months, the average attendance at each of the classes has been satisfactory, and the results obtained good.

Two changes have been made in the staff. In December, 1898, Mr. W. A. MacLeod, B.Sc., who had discharged the arduous duties of assistant for seventeen months with much credit and success, was offered a lucrative appointment at the Hobart University; and Mr. W. H. Baker, a former student at the Thames School of Mines was appointed as his successor. Mr. Baker proved himself an excellent student. He gained a university scholarship from this school, and studying at the Otago University and the Auckland University College he has gained the degree of Bachelor of Science. During the short time he has held the position of assistant he has shown himself thoroughly qualified, and will, I am sure, discharge his duties in an entirely satisfactory manner.

In June, 1898, Mr. R. B. Vercoe, who for three years and a half had acted as amalgamator and cyanider in the school experimental plant, and had proved himself thoroughly reliable and efficient, accepted the position of battery-manager of the Monowai battery and cyanide plant. While at the school Mr. Vercoe took classes and obtained the Government battery-superintendent's certificate by examination. His position was filled by Mr. P. Grayden, who has also proved himself a capable battery-manager, and has given every satisfaction.

The average number of registered students during 1898-99 was sixty-four, while the average number of individual students attending the school for the same period was 129. This is lower than for the two previous years, when the mining boom was at its height, but the institution has now just about as many students as it can conveniently accommodate without overcrowding, and, as the students now on the roll attend more regularly than formerly, the attendance is quite satisfactory. The fact of there being one school at Waihi and another at Coromandel, and the possibility of obtaining employment near to them, tend to decrease the number of students here, where work is difficult to obtain.

During the past year a considerable number of students have been compelled to leave the district in search of employment, and work is still scarce in the immediate neighbourhood of the institution. Still, it is gratifying to note that the attendance for the first term of 1899 is equal to that of the last term of 1898, and all the more so because the first term of each year is the one usually least well attended.

During 1898 thirty-nine first-class and seventeen second-class mine-managers' certificates were granted in this district without examination to holders of service certificates, and, as this principle is opposed to that of requiring candidates to study at a school of mines and gain a certificate by examination, the result may reasonably be expected to be a falling-off in the number of mining men who attend the school with the object of working up for the examination. Nevertheless, it cannot