

As the result of the continued demand for coal, new collieries are being developed on the West Coast and in the Waikato. As soon as these mines are opened out they will no doubt add considerably to our mineral-production.

There has been a gradual annual decrease in the quantity of coal imported during recent years. In 1908 we imported 287,808 tons, valued at £274,605; 1909, 258,185 tons, valued at £253,081; and last year, 232,378 tons, valued at £230,765, being a reduction of approximately 57,000 tons in quantity and £44,000 in value. On the other hand, it is gratifying to inform honourable members that considerable improvement has taken place in our coal-export trade during the same period. In 1908 we exported 100,502 tons, valued at £85,846; in 1909, 201,685 tons, valued at £183,961; and last year 277,011 tons, valued at £259,562, being an increase in two years of 176,509 tons in quantity, and £173,716 in value. These figures indicate that the first-class quality of our bituminous coal commands a market not only in the Commonwealth, but also throughout the Southern Pacific. I may not be considered optimistic in expressing my opinion that the export of our bituminous coal is capable of being enormously extended. On reference to Table 7 attached it will be observed that the increased prosperity in the coal trade was practically participated in by every coal-mine in the Dominion. There were 408 more men engaged in connection with coal-mining last year than there were two years ago.

In my last Statement I made reference to a discovery of lignite at Retaruke, near Waimarino. A prospecting party of three men, under a certificated mine-manager, was employed by the Mines Department in exploring this locality. Four drives, aggregating 124 ft., were put in. The results were disappointing. In each drive bands of dirt were found to be continuous. The coal is of poor quality, containing excessive water, ash, and sulphur—all defects. The exploration was discontinued owing to results not warranting further consideration.

Discoveries of coal have recently been reported to the Department from the Bay of Plenty and also from the East Cape district, but the information in connection with them at present available is insufficient to express an opinion as to whether they are of any commercial value.

STATE COAL-MINES.

The output from the Point Elizabeth No. 1 and Seddonville collieries during 1910 amounted to 212,888 and 62,714 tons respectively, being in the aggregate a decline of 8,558 tons as compared with the output for the previous year. This decline may be attributed to the approaching exhaustion of the older sections of these collieries; but it will be reassuring to state that next year the extensive unworked coal-area known as the Point Elizabeth No. 2 Mine will reach the output stage. The development-works, consisting of incline tunnels and viaducts, are approaching completion. The railway connecting this mine with the existing railway at Runanga has been finished, and there now only remains the coal-storage bins and surface arrangements to completely equip this extensive colliery.

At the Seddonville Mine a considerable area of high-class bituminous coal has been proved by diamond drilling in the Charming Creek section, and it is believed that a workable area will be developed adjoining the present mine.

The briquette-works in connection with the mine have not proved a success, owing to the high price of pitch and heavy cost of manufacture.

VENTILATION OF MINES.

Special attention has been devoted to this very important subject, and it is now believed that, taken as a whole, the mines of the Dominion are fairly well ventilated. To a certain extent this opinion is substantiated by the fact that in the fourteen years prior to the end of December, 1910, no life has been lost as the result of an explosion of firedamp.

At all collieries and quartz-mines but those of insignificant proportions ventilation is produced by fans of modern type. Good ventilation is now recognized as a necessity, for, apart from the legislative enforcement of hygienic measures as a matter of public policy, the ventilation of mines has an important economic aspect, since it affects to a large extent the industrial efficiency and health of the workmen.