

In addition to the important development of certain mines, with reference to inspection indicated by these figures, they also show that while during the year the import of coal has in some measure decreased, the quantity raised and consumed in the Colony has largely increased, and it will also be found that the Customs return shows an increased export, which may be significant of some further improvement in this trade as well as the home trade in coal.

ACCIDENTS.

A schedule of accidents in coal mines reported during the year will be found in Return No. 3, following the appendix. * This shows that there have been reported six injurious, and two fatal accidents. Of the latter, the one calling for special additional remark here is that which occurred to John Broadfoot, at the Brunner mine, on the 3rd of March last. It appears from the evidence taken at the inquest that a Guibal fan had been erected to remove the foul air from the stone drift, and that Broadfoot was killed by an explosion of fire-damp while examining the working of the fan with a naked light.

Mr. Inspector Binns attended at the inquest, and reminded the manager that he had previously warned him and the owner of the mine, Mr. Kennedy, that an accident would occur if precautions were not taken, and special rule 30 as to the daily examination of the mine were not adhered to; but it did not appear from the evidence that the cause of the accident could be referred to any direct breach of rules.

It will be seen, however, from Mr. Binns's last report upon this mine, that a new manager has been appointed, and that Mr. Binns considers the ventilation sufficient for the present.

Mr. Kennedy, also, in writing to me upon this subject on the 22nd of April last, adds the following postscript:—"I may here mention that I have recently employed a manager, having a home certificate, who is also known to Mr. Binns to be well up in his profession. He is now daily expected here. This action has been taken as a precautionary measure to avoid as far possible any further casualty in our mine."

THE WORKING OF THE PRESENT ACT—ITS EFFECT. CONCLUSION.

In 1878, a Bill, known as Mr. Wason's Regulation of Mines Bill, was reported from the Goldfields Committee, and was intended to repeal "The Regulation of Mines Act, 1874," which had not then been brought generally into force. The chief object of Mr. Wason's Bill was to provide for certificated managers of mines; but Mr. Wason's Bill never became law, and the proposed amended Regulation of Mines Bill referred to in this report, and more particularly in my report of last year, also included this subject. I refer to this in order that I may state my opinion that, although the present Act, "The Regulation of Mines Act, 1874," does not provide for certificated managers, this difficulty will be got over by the fact of recent emigration of a better class from England, having brought to the Colony a number of experienced managers, holding home certificates, some of whom have already to my knowledge been employed by mine owners in preference to former managers less qualified.

It was also apprehended that Inspectors would find a difficulty in compelling the compliance of owners and managers with notices in certain cases; but under further experience of the present Act, it is found so far that owners and managers have a very wholesome dread of proceeding to arbitration as provided in Part V. of the Act, and that they infinitely prefer to remedy any defect complained of by an Inspector, under section 19, than to run the risk of incurring the heavy costs which might be the result of a tedious enquiry, after submitting the matter to arbitration. It may still, however, be necessary, as I pointed out in my last report, to provide some improved method of settling disputes (should such occur) between the Government and mine owners and managers. In very many cases,

* No doubt many accidents of an ordinary character have not been reported; but now that Inspectors have been placed in charge of districts, more full information about accidents will be obtained.