

great development until the improvements to the harbours of Westport and Greymouth are sufficiently advanced to admit of large vessels loading up for foreign ports. Even with a much larger output of coal in the colony than is necessary for its own requirements, it cannot be expected that the importation of coal from New South Wales will altogether cease, for a certain quantity will come as ballast on vessels trading between the two colonies.

ACCIDENTS IN COAL-MINES.

Notwithstanding the precautions taken by the department to provide for the safety of the workmen employed in the coal-mines, the number of accidents during the twelve months ended the 31st March last has been unusually large. There were in all thirty-one accidents, four of which proved fatal. This is at the rate of one accident for every 17,697 tons of coal won, or one fatal accident for every 139,655 tons, whereas during the previous year there were only seventeen accidents, or at the rate of one for every 31,432 tons of output, and none of them were fatal. This shows the necessity of having the mines carefully looked after; but, even with all the supervision that can possibly be exercised over them, accidents cannot be always prevented. The workmen themselves show great carelessness in many instances; and when this can be proved—which is often a difficult matter—it is the duty of the Inspectors to take proceedings against them. This has been done in several cases. It is due to those having the management of the mines in which accidents occurred during last year to state that in each case, inquiries having been made, it was found that no blame attached to them.

The department endeavours to carry out the general spirit of the Act so as to secure the safety of the workmen; but without the cordial co-operation of the managers, and above all of the workmen themselves, this desirable end cannot be attained.

KAURI-GUM.

It is no doubt somewhat fanciful to include the resinous exudation of the kauri pine (*Dammaris Australis*) in a mines report, as though it were a mineral substance. It has this, however, in common with minerals, that it is dug out of the ground, and to some extent its crystallization has been altered since it became buried there. The deposits extend more or less over the northern portion of the Auckland Provincial District, in the forests, and extensively in open country and the sites of ancient forests, of which, but for this valuable product, not a vestige remains to mark the spot where ages ago the magnificent kauri reared its noble stem and adorned the landscape with groves of beauty and sublimity such as no other tree-growth can surpass.

The extensive use of the gum as a varnish in America and Europe has for many years led to a large export trade. The value of the export in 1887 was £362,449, or equal to nearly one-half the value of the gold export of the colony for the same year. The search for the gum is engaged in by both Europeans and Maoris, and at certain seasons of the year as many as ten thousand persons are engaged in connection with this industry. The gum-digger in the matter of outfit has greatly the advantage of the gold-digger: he requires neither water-race, nor sludge-channel, nor crushing machinery, nor other costly preliminary of time or money, but, accoutred with a steel-tipped prod, a spade, and a bag, he goes forth in search of treasure-trove, and, although he cannot indulge in the dreams of sudden wealth which fascinate the gold-seeker, he is sure, at least, of always averaging a fair wage.

This general and equal distribution of the gains of the gum-industry throughout the district is of more value to the community than the more splendid but irregular gains of the gold-seeker. In the notice of this industry, however, it should be observed that its pursuit has a tendency to foster roaming and irregular habits, unfavourable to after application to steady industry; and it is even thought that, while the gumfields last, the improvement of the district north of Auckland, an area of about three million acres, will not be so rapid in the cultivation of the soil and in fruit-growing, for which it is peculiarly well adapted, as it would be were there no gumfields.

The statistics of the industry show that, from its commencement in 1853 to the 31st March, 1888, the quantity exported was 113,247½ tons, representing a value of £4,407,023. Hitherto the right to dig gum on the Crown lands had, in some instances, been secured by some one leasing a large area, erecting a store, and only allowing those to dig within his area who traded with him. This led to some evils, which it is proposed to obviate by issuing licenses at ten shillings per annum, conferring on the holder the same right to dig on the Crown lands that the miner's right confers on the goldfields. Rangers have been appointed to see that no digging is carried on in the forests except during the five winter months, from the 1st May to the 30th September, when there is but little risk of the destruction of the forest by accidental fire.

EARNINGS OF MINERS.

Gold-mining.—The number of persons engaged in gold-mining on the 31st March last was 11,720, and at the end of the previous year 11,782, making the average number throughout the year 11,751. The value of gold exported for the twelve months ended the 31st March being £766,330, gives an average earning for miners of £65 4s. 3d.; for the year previous it was £80 12s. 7d.

Coal-mines.—The number of men and boys engaged in coal-mining at the end of 1887 was 1,499; and, as at the end of the previous year the number was 1,605, the average for 1887 may be stated as 1,552. Taking the cost of hewing the coal and other labour in working the mines at 6s. per ton, the average earning will be about £108 per man.

VALUE OF PLANT, MACHINERY, AND OTHER WORKS IN CONNECTION WITH GOLD-MINING.

The value of machinery and plant in connection with gold-mining at the end of last year was estimated as follows:—