

in the output of this class last year of 64,127 tons; while the output of brown coal was 161,904 tons, and pitch coal 96,979 tons, as against 171,725 tons and 124,593 tons respectively for the previous year—showing a falling-off in the output of these classes of coal to the extent of 37,435 tons; while during the same period 22,072 tons of lignite was raised, being 4,705 tons more than for the previous year. The supply of lignite is entirely regulated by the demand in the immediate vicinity of the pits where it is raised, and the demand for brown and pitch coal will always depend upon the output of bituminous coal, and the price it can be supplied at in the district where brown and pitch coal are obtained.

Any large increased output of coal in future must necessarily be from the bituminous coal-mines, and as these are, as I have already remarked, situated on the west coast of the Middle Island, where the harbours are yet in course of construction, it will take a number of years yet before the coalfield is properly developed and the mines opened up. The districts in which there was an increased output last year were: Westport, 35,788 tons; Greymouth, 26,504 tons; and Mokau, 2,525 tons; the principal increase being from the Westport and Brunner Collieries. It is to be regretted that the Kawakawa Mine, in the Bay of Islands County, is almost worked out, the old workings being now abandoned. Some new workings are being opened up with a view of taking out a small area of coal left in pillars in the early days when the mine was first opened. There is a large coal-field between Hikurangi and Hukerenui, which is now being opened up by the extension of the railway from Kamo, and when this is completed it will afford a cheap means of transit of the coal to a port of shipment. The coal found in this locality is much superior to that found at Kamo, being somewhat similar in quality to that obtained at Kawakawa.

In reference to our bituminous coalfields, it is deplorable to see the waste of coal that is carried on at some of the mines. It will be recollected by some honourable members that when Mr. Kennedy, the managing director of Brunner Colliery, was giving his evidence last year before the Goldfields Committee on some of the measures of the Coal-mines Act which was passed last session, he stated that about 500 tons of slack coal was emptied into the Grey River every month from the Brunner Mine alone, which ought to be utilised and converted into a marketable commodity. There is a large market for coke of good quality in the Australian Colonies, and by a proper system of manufacture the slack from the mines on the West Coast would make the finest coke in the world. I called attention to this in my last Statement, and the facts are fully borne out by the statements in a letter addressed to the Hon. John See, the Treasurer of New South Wales, by the secretary of the Broken Hill Proprietary Company, which has been published. In this letter it is asserted that the Broken Hill Company is using 1,000 tons of coke per week, but that all the colonial coke that has been tried is far inferior to that of either English or German manufacture, on account of the slack not being washed, prepared, dressed, and burned, so as to make it more dense and hard.

Colonial coke is found to contain about 6 per cent. more ash than English coke, and this is stated to be equal to using eighty tons more of the colonial than the English article every week, reducing the capacity of the furnaces by seventy tons of ore per week, and also necessitating seventy tons more flux being used for the same period, or, as the secretary states, "The use of colonial coke instead of English would mulct the company in the sum of £645 weekly, made up as follows: Eighty tons at £5 per ton, £400; profit on seventy tons of ore at £2 10s. per ton, £175; seventy tons of flux—iron and lime—£70." The secretary to the company estimates the loss with English coke at 7 per cent., and colonial coke 13 per cent., while he states that most of the colonial coke can stand no burden, but crumbles up quickly in the furnaces, and fills the space around the tuyeres with fine coke, causing large losses in lead and silver, both chemically and mechanically. He further states that they find it inferior to such a degree that its use to a great extent is entirely out of the question, and leaves no other course open to the company but to use either the English or continental manufacture.

This is to be deplored, seeing that we have the finest coal in the world for the manufacture of coke. The coal-mine proprietors would find it to their advantage to wash and dress the slack-coal as carefully as they do in Europe before manufacturing it into coke. When coke is friable and easily broken, either in transit or in the furnace, it interferes very seriously with smelting, and becomes embedded in slags, and absorbs the lead. Special care should be taken to remove all shale and earthy matters from the slack, so as to have a less percentage of ash. If this were done there is a large market to be found, both in Australia and Tasmania, for good coke; and what is now being washed down the Grey River into the ocean ought to form an important as well as a profitable industry.