

SCHOOLS OF MINES.

The beneficial effects of technical education in mining, which was intended to result from the inauguration of Schools of Mines, are now being realised. Mine-managers frankly admit the great advantages derived by attendance at these schools, while the young men who are growing up, and who are getting their livelihood at mining, are qualifying themselves to hold the position of managers both by technical education and practical experience. The latter can only be obtained by going through the different branches of mining, and learning to do the actual work. When these schools were first inaugurated, many mining men ridiculed the idea of mining instruction in a school being of any benefit, and that compelling a mine-manager to undergo a certain examination before he could hold a certificate as mine-manager would deal harshly with mine proprietors, as it would be almost impossible to obtain men competent to fill the position of manager as they were required.

However, they have been found to work extremely satisfactorily; not only has there been a sufficient number of men qualified to fill the position of mine-managers, but several have left for other colonies, and received good appointments.

The Hon. the Minister of Mines offered three university scholarships last year, to be tenable for three years; but only two candidates came up for examination—Mr. J. McLaren, from the Thames, and Mr. J. Lee, from Reefton. The latter failed to get the necessary number of marks in the different subjects entitling him to a scholarship. The former candidate (Mr. J. McLaren) passed very creditably, getting 80·6 per cent. of the marks on nine different subjects.

Amongst the different schools, as far as purely technical mining education is concerned, there is far more opportunity for students to see the practical working in the mines at the Thames than there is at any other place where a school of mines is situated. The school is directly in the heart of a large quartz-mining district, where the students can be taken underground, and the different systems of workings fully explained to them. The managers of the mines also give many of the students opportunities of making underground surveys, and thereby through actual practice, as well as theoretical training, the students are better able to understand the principles taught them. Although Reefton is a large mining centre, the town itself is nearly three miles distant from any of the mines, so that very few of the actual miners live in the township, and therefore cannot avail themselves of the opportunity of attending a course of technical instruction the same as men can do at the Thames, where most of the miners are in or near the township. The Otago School of Mines, located at the university building in Dunedin, being without any crushing, amalgamating, or cyanide plant, the students have not the same opportunity of acquiring the practical experience as they have at the Thames School, where all these appliances are erected and worked by the students. At the same time, there are other advantages at the university school which the students at the other schools of mines have not got.

THAMES SCHOOL.

Notwithstanding the great depression there has been in mining in the Thames district last year, and the decrease of the number of men employed in the mines, the attendance at the school has been, on the whole, satisfactory, the average number of registered students last year being thirty-five, in lieu of forty for the previous year. The total number of individuals attending the school and science classes were, however, considerably less last year than for the previous one, the average number being sixty-eight, whereas for the former year there were ninety. Mr. Park, however, states that for the present year thirty-five students have been registered for the first time, of which a large proportion has come from different parts of the Auckland District beyond the limits of the Thames goldfield. This shows that the teaching at this institution is appreciated by those residing at a distance as well as by the residents of the place.

The assistant teacher, Mr. F. B. Allen, M.A., during about ten weeks of last year, went round the mining centres on the West Coast, and gave a course of lectures at Denniston, Brunnerton, Kumara, Stafford, Hokitika, Rimu, &c., his place at the Thames School being temporarily filled by Mr. J. M. McLaren, the successful candidate for one of the university scholarships. The only real benefit that peripatetic lectures do in localities where no regular school is held is to stir up a desire amongst those following mining as an occupation to acquire a technical knowledge of the work they are engaged in or desire to follow up for a livelihood. Beyond this there is no lasting benefit. In order to acquire a knowledge of mining scientifically a regular course of instruction has to be attended. By merely attending lectures for a week now and then, students forget what they were taught before the next course of lectures is held. The continuous teaching of the Thames School for about forty weeks during the year has been the means of its great success.

The following is the report of Mr. James Park, F.G.S., the Director, on the progress made and work done at the school during last year:—

I have the honour to report that the past year has been a very busy and successful one, and in some respects it has shown a marked improvement on the preceding year. The average attendance of registered students was thirty-nine, compared with forty for the year 1893–94, which shows that the school has been holding its ground notwithstanding the acute depression which has existed at the Thames during the past year or two. For the three terms of 1894 the average attendance was 29·3, and for the first term of the present year fifty, which is a substantial increase of over 76 per cent. Of these fifty students, no less than thirty-five have registered for the first time, a large number of them having come from different parts of the provincial district beyond the limits of the Thames Goldfield.