

66,197 tons. The coal imported from other countries last year was 101,756 tons, while for the former year there were 108,198 tons, showing a decrease in the importation last year of 6,442 tons. The imports were 2,447 tons from the United Kingdom, 99,304 tons from New South Wales, and 5 tons from Victoria. The total export of coal was 86,280 tons, of which 79,524 tons was colonial produce, and 6,756 tons imported coal from other countries. Of the quantity of coal exported, 58,306 tons was for coaling direct steamers trading between the colony and the United Kingdom, and will therefore be treated, as in former Statements, as coal consumed within the colony, as these steamers are wholly employed in trade between New Zealand and Great Britain. Taking, therefore, the output from our mines and the coal imported, we have a total of 894,607 tons, of which 27,974 tons was exported, leaving the consumption within the colony last year to be 866,633 tons, as against 808,701 tons for the previous year, being an increased consumption last year of 57,932 tons. Taking the output of the different classes of coal from the mines in the colony, there was 473,637 tons of bituminous coal, 110,547 tons of pitch-coal, 179,744 tons of brown coal, and 28,923 tons of lignite; which shows an increased production last year of 43,656 tons of bituminous coal, 5,981 tons of pitch-coal, 13,047 tons of brown coal, and 3,513 tons from the lignite-pits.

The districts in which there was the largest increase last year were Kawakawa and Hikurangi, where the increase was 9,006 tons. This was due entirely to the workings of the Hikurangi Coal Company's mine being more developed, the output last year being 27,980 tons. There was also an increased production from the mines in the Waikato district of 6,341 tons. There were large increases from the mines in the Otago district of 11,483 tons, Southland district of 4,285 tons, and Westport 39,553 tons; but there was a falling-off in other districts, the largest decreased production being in the Greymouth district, which was 4,774 tons.

The mines in which there has been the largest output are the Coalbrookdale, 190,975 tons; Brunner, 92,118 tons; Kaitangata, 72,536 tons; Blackball, 45,772 tons; Westport-Cardiff, 40,431 tons; Taupiri Extended, 28,988 tons; Hikurangi, 27,980 tons; Shag Point, 21,097 tons; Granity Creek, 20,543 tons; Ngunguru, 20,233 tons; Taupiri Reserve, 18,660 tons; Nightcaps, 16,905 tons; Walton Park, 16,612 tons; Waikato, 14,233 tons; New Bay of Islands, 13,967 tons; Castle Hill, 12,825 tons; and Allandale, 11,455 tons: the output from all the other mines being under 10,000 tons.

ACCIDENTS IN COAL-MINES.

There was only one fatal accident, whereby a miner was killed at the Fernhill Mine, in South Otago, in addition to the sad disaster at the Brunner Mine on the 26th March, 1896, when, by an explosion, sixty-five men lost their lives. The departmental inquiries made show that in the first case no blame could be attached to the mine-owners or any one connected with the mine. The report of the Royal Commission appointed to inquire into the cause of the disaster at the Brunner Mine dealt with the matter in such an exhaustive manner that any further reference to it need not now be made.

EARNINGS OF COAL-MINERS.

As was observed in the Statement of last year, the earnings of the coal-miners depend greatly on the time they can work in the mines. As far as the bituminous mines on the West Coast are concerned, the men are not steadily employed, the output being controlled by the regularity with which vessels enter the ports of Westport and Greymouth to take away the coal. There is not sufficient storage, either at the mines or the ports, for large quantities of coal, and on many occasions vessels are prevented by stormy weather from entering or leaving these ports, no work being done in the mines in the meantime, unless in making repairs. If the miners could get constant employment they could earn good wages; but, as it is, they are sometimes idle for one and two days a week, and when coal is required to load vessels more men have to be employed than would be the case if sufficient storage of coal was provided at the mines.