

UREWERA COUNTRY.

The Urewera country has now been open to the prospector and the miner for over a year, but, so far, previous expectations as to the mineral possibilities of this formerly tabooed area have not been fulfilled.

While it is known that some prospectors have carefully, if somewhat superficially, examined the country, no mineral discoveries of any description have been reported to the Mines Department. It does not, however, follow that the Urewera is barren of mineral-values; and while, so far, pressure of other important investigations prevented any officer of the Geological Survey Branch of the Mines Department making any examination of this somewhat unknown portion of the country, I propose to take an early opportunity of getting at least a preliminary geological report made by one of the officers of the Department.

SCHOOLS OF MINES.

These schools in our mining districts, and the Dunedin School in connection with the Otago University, are rendering excellent services to the young generation of miners in this Dominion. The Government assistance granted to these schools during the year amounted to £3,261 8s. 4d., making a total of £44,619 granted since their inception in 1885, being an average of £1,777 a year during the twenty-five years of their existence. The results obtained can only be regarded as highly satisfactory. During the year 100 students from the different mining districts presented themselves for examination.

There are at present four scholarships available in connection with examinations in gold-mining subjects, and no scholarships in connection with coal-mining subjects. In only two years since their inauguration in 1895 have more than two of these scholarships been taken up in any one year. I now propose to establish two scholarships for passes in coal-mining subjects on similar conditions to the scholarships already available for gold-mining subjects.

BOARDS OF EXAMINERS.

Suggestions have been made regarding the amalgamation and reorganization of the two Boards of Examiners, and also as to the methods of examination, with a view to obtaining more uniformity and efficiency in administration. So far, no alteration has been made, but the matter will receive my early consideration. Mine-managers and battery-superintendents who qualify for the New Zealand Government certificate are now considered the most competent and best-qualified men available, and readily obtain the highest positions of trust and responsibility in every part of the world.

WATER-CONSERVATION.

Two parties of surveyors have been employed during the year in connection with water-conservation for mining and irrigation in Central Otago. The surveying and engineering details necessary for the consideration of several of the schemes dealt with are now ready for final examination. Some of them will, however, require to be considered in connection with the hydro-electric proposals to be submitted to Parliament this session, and will be further dealt with in the Public Works Statement.

WATER-RACES.

The returns from Government water-races on goldfields show a slight improvement during the past year. The extension of the Kumara Water-race across the Taramakau is now well in hand. Contracts have been let during the year for the necessary ditching, and the material for the pipe-line is under order from England. It is anticipated that this work will be completed during the present year. It is also probable that it will be found expedient to increase the carrying-capacity of the Mount Ida Water-race: this matter is at present being inquired into.