

EKETAHUNA.

SIR,—

Eketahuna, 8th April, 1897.

I have the honour to submit my labour report for the year ending the 31st March, 1897, in this district.

To date, there are twenty-one factories registered, employing eighty-six persons, principally male adults, with about three hundred others depending on them. Taking into consideration the locality and roughness of the country, the Acts are fairly complied with; the owners exhibit every tendency to comply with the provisions of the Acts, and any suggestions made by me are complied with, rendering friction scarcely possible.

The chief industry under this heading is sawmilling. It employs a large number of hands, directly and indirectly, and is the means of causing a large amount of money to circulate in the district. The extra facilities for transport of timber by the railway authorities has been the means of increasing the output of timber, a much greater amount being placed upon the Wellington market, independent of the amount required locally. Two sawmills were destroyed during the year by a bush-fire, one of which has since been rebuilt, and will soon be in working-order. One mill has ceased working. A sawmill formerly at Hamua has been moved to Brownston on account of being on the railway-line and a better supply of timber. Since the sale of the kauri reserve by Government a sawmill has been commenced in that locality, and will soon be completed and working, employing a number of men, and increasing the circulation of money.

The Shops and Shop-assistants Act, with reference to compulsory closing of business, is not in force in this district. The shop- and factory-owners, however, have an understanding that they close on the same half-day (Thursday), which is done the same as if the Act were in force.

The building and other trades have been fairly brisk during the year. A large number of private dwelling-houses have been erected, and others are in course of erection. Three or four shops have been erected, and another is in course of erection; one of those re-erected (Wairarapa Farmers' Co-operative) would be a credit to any city, and greatly improves the place by appearance and competition.

A number of road contracts have been let during the year, principally during the latter portion, and have given employment to a number of labouring-men. Fencing and bushfelling, with grass-seeding, have been in full swing, and have given employment to a large number who were less suited to the more laborious work of navvying.

One hundred and seventy-three persons, consisting of skilled and unskilled labour, registered their names here for co-operative work, principally because the wage, when earned, was certain to be paid (wage-payment in this district being uncertain); hence the co-operative works for labourers get the best men. Of the number registered, employment was found for eight carpenters, one painter, one plumber, two bricklayers, and ninety labourers, having 315 adults and children depending upon them. Of the remainder, a portion procured private work; the others could not wait for employment.

No applications for work have been made during the past month by labourers, thus showing that they must be all employed, and work fairly plentiful to those willing to work.

The usual number of swaggers passed through the district during the year, some requiring work, but they were the exceptions and not the rule.

The different places of business have had a fair year, and do not unduly complain of slackness of business. No doubt, as the co-operative railway employes get farther away from this district they will spend their earnings in the next, which, of course, causes a loss to the one and a gain to the other.

A bush-fire occurred here during last December, destroying two sawmills, a number of dwelling-houses, some stock, fences, and grass. The grass in a majority of cases being kept for seed, it will be a serious loss to the settlers, as a great number were depending on the grass-seed for winter improvements. The fire in an indirect way has been a benefit, as the country is better cleared by it of fallen timber and logs than by the usual bush-fire. Relief committees were formed at Masterton and Hastwell, which has been the means of assisting the settlers who have suffered by the fire in a most praiseworthy and substantial manner.

The creameries and butter-factories in the district have been fully employed during the past season. Suppliers appear satisfied with their earnings. Wool and stock have had a good market, the former being up to former prices, and the latter in demand. As this is a pastoral and not an agricultural district, the crops sown are very small, and scarcely worth noticing.

I have, &c.,

CHARLES GREY, Inspector of Factories.

The Chief Inspector of Factories, Wellington.

BLENHEIM.

SIR,—

Police Office, Blenheim, 31st March, 1897.

I have the honour to forward you the yearly report *re* the Factories and the Shops and Shop-assistants Acts.

There are sixty factories in this district, employing 229 males and twenty-one females, as against 280 males and eighteen females for the year 1896.

Trade, on the whole, has been very quiet during the year, and from what I can hear Blenheim is going back very much. No doubt the floods have affected the district to a great extent. During the last nine months three floods have visited this district, causing much damage in the low parts, and a number of farmers have had to sow their crops no less than three times.