

great extent, an area of 309 acres being cropped during the year, with fair results. The live-stock on the estate consists of 3,355 sheep, 44 pigs, 41 horses, and 276 cattle, being 812 more than last year. A creamery has been erected on the settlement, and nearly all the settlers are suppliers, and this, together with the good prices for wool and stock, has put the settlers in good heart, and they are well satisfied with their holdings and prospects. The land is chiefly used for pastoral purposes, and a large amount of work has been done during the year in ploughing, grassing, and clearing, and the success of this settlement appears to be now assured.

Braeburn Settlement.—The area available for selection in this settlement is 17,466 acres, of which 14,004 acres are occupied by eighteen selectors. The unselected areas are being gradually taken up, and before long the whole settlement will be selected. Grazing is the chief industry, and the settlers are making steady progress in clearing and grassing the land; very little cropping is done, owing to the cost of carriage to market, and crops are grown only for the settlers' own use. During the year 1,030 acres of bush have been felled, and, owing to the dry season, splendid burns have been obtained. Several contracts for areas of 200 to 500 acres have been let for felling this season. The dairy factory at Murchison has been a great factor towards the success of this settlement, and in a few years there will be a factory on the settlement at the present rate of progress. Improvements to the value of £6,497 have been effected, being £2,067 more than the requirements of the Act. The live-stock now number 4,114, and of this number 247 are dairy cows, an increase of 114 over last year. There is now no doubt about the ultimate success of this settlement.

ROBT. T. SADD,
Commissioner of Crown Lands.

MARLBOROUGH.

The land in this district which has been settled under the Land for Settlements Act may be considered, taken as a whole, quite satisfactory to the holders, and, although some of the rents approach dangerously near the maximum which can be safely paid under average conditions, out of the whole of the holdings under settlement conditions I think there is hardly any one who can be termed an absolute failure, although, of course, as farming is as much of a business as any other calling, and as men differ very considerably, there are naturally various grades of well-doing; but it is observed that most of the transfers which come before the Land Board disclose the fact that in nearly every case substantial goodwills, outside the value of improvements, are being demanded.

The total area of land held is 109,873 acres, and supports a population of 1,090 persons, living in 250 houses, who own among them 121,121 sheep, 1,166 cattle, 1,235 horses, and 372 pigs—that is, an increase over last year of 20,418 sheep, 150 head of cattle, 50 head of horses, and 17 pigs; and in the same period there was an increase of 466 acres of white crops and 293 acres of green crops. The sheep carried on all this land-for-settlements land works out at 1·1 sheep per acre for the total area, and deducting the area under white crop—viz., 10,149 acres—the sheep carried amount to 1·21 per acre. In this connection it may be interesting to note that the whole Flaxbourne Estate of 56,460 acres carried in 1904—the year before it was taken over—47,046 sheep, and the mean of the last five years was 48,900, or at the rate of 0·866 sheep per acre. We have no return showing how many acres the original holders had under white and green crops then, but at the present date the area under lease, less the area in white crop, is 42,812 acres, and the number of sheep carried, besides 891 great cattle and horses, is 47,377, or an average of 1·106 per acre. Unfortunately, we have no information which will enable us to carry the comparison further in other respects, but I think it may be assumed that the old estate would suffer on a population basis, because there are now residing on the estate 358 persons, which is probably fully three times the number that were employed by the estate when worked as one property.

The past season, owing to climatic conditions, may be claimed as a satisfactory one, and, although Starborough and Blind River Settlements suffered in common with the rest of the Dominion from a very dry spring, which affected the crops to a considerable extent, I think, on the whole, satisfactory returns have been received by the majority of the settlers, and in some instances they have been decidedly good. Flaxbourne has been rather fortunate in getting a fair amount of moisture, but unfortunately, as in the two former years, this settlement has again been subject to a large loss of crops by the ravages of the caterpillar, and in some instances the settlers have lost nearly the whole of their crops of oats; it is becoming a very serious matter, the constant recurrence of this pest. No one appears to be able to give any reasonable explanation of why this special district should continue to be subject to this particular pest. In some cases certain fields are destroyed, while other localities apparently under similar general conditions have escaped, and no theory that I have ever heard propounded appears to satisfy the whole observed phenomena, for weather-conditions alone appear inadequate to account for the prevalence in certain seasons and localities. It may, however, be noted that caterpillars do not appear generally until about Christmas-time, or even later. If this is so, and it is possible to accelerate the ripening of the crops by early sowing or the selection of early-maturing varieties of grain so as to enable the crops to be harvested before the pests are in their full vigour, some alleviation of the mischief may be possible. This is a matter of very great importance to the Flaxbourne settlers generally, and we can only hope that as a knowledge of the causes of this pest are better known a remedy may be found.

The railway is now opened to Ward Township, and should be of immense use to the settlers, by placing them on a more even footing with other communities who enjoy greater transport