

The passing of "The Shearers' Accommodation Act, 1898," is most favourably accepted by the settlers, it having repealed the provisions of "The Factories Act, 1894," and subsequent amendments, which probably were not, in general, applicable to small farmers. I have heard expressions of satisfaction from settlers regarding this Act.

Old and decrepit men, who were only fit to be inmates of some charitable home, are not, as formerly, to be found on the roads. This, no doubt, is owing to the passing of "The Old-age Pensions Act, 1898." There is a great improvement noticeable with many of the working-men. Men formerly, after finishing a bush contract or other work, wasted their money in drunkenness; they are now to be found steady and more careful of their comforts in every way. A good healthy moral tone prevails. This district, I am sure, is in a prosperous state, and has a bright future before it, and will compare favourably with very many older-settled districts.

I am, &c.,

CHAS. BOWDEN, Inspector of Factories.

E. Tregear, Esq., Chief Inspector of Factories, Wellington.

EKETAHUNA.

SIR,—

Police-station, Eketahuna, 4th April, 1899.

I have the honour to submit my labour report for the year ending the 31st March, 1899.

The labour-market during the past year has been fairly good, considering that the greater number of settlers in this district have small holdings, and therefore do most of the labour required themselves. The district being pastoral, very little agricultural work is required, the area under cultivation not exceeding 300 acres, consisting principally of oats and potatoes. No other grain-crops are sown.

The principal factories, as will be seen, are sawmills; they also give the greatest amount of employment. Stock sales take place on an average once a month during the year. The stock fetches fair prices, being low during winter months, owing to scarcity of feed, and improving as the grass gets plentiful. During the past twelve months the same number of swaggers have been on the road; they are more to be noticed during the winter months than now; and, in the majority of cases, the same men pass year after year.

The district, as a whole, appears to be in a sound condition, and must improve as new settlers come into it and work the land now lying idle. There have been several persons in the district inquiring with a view to taking up land. Several properties have changed hands, and few are in the market.

FACTORIES.

Under this heading the main industry is sawmilling. There have been twenty factories registered during the year, and one in course of erection, against twenty-four the preceding year. The decrease has not been owing to financial difficulty, but to scarcity of timber suitable for milling purposes and want of roads to put that which would be available on the market at a paying price. There are ninety-eight persons employed in the factories. Of this number, two are females and one a youth. No permits have been granted during the year.

Over a hundred persons are employed by the factory-owners and contractors who do not come within the provisions of the Act, consisting of bullock-drivers, tram-horse drivers, tram-layers, bushfellers, &c., who depend to a great extent on the sawmills for work. A large percentage of these and of employes at the factories are married men and settlers with small holdings, the industry assisting them to a great extent.

One of the factories is now using a steam-engine to haul logs, doing away with the old style of using bullocks. This is a great improvement, and is a sign of progress.

There have been four accidents reported during the year, none of them of a very serious nature. An accident occurred to a tram-driver named Semmens, which, after ten days, terminated fatally. Semmens was engaged working for Mr. Thomas Price putting logs on a tramway-trolley to take to the sawmill, when the log rolled back and crushed him, through the jack he was using slipping. No blame is attached to any person, Semmens alone being responsible.

THE SHOPS AND SHOP-ASSISTANTS ACT.

The provisions of the above Act are complied with, there being no complaints. There being no legal half-holiday in this district, the business places, with the exception of the Bank of New Zealand, are closed on Thursday afternoons.

There have been no prosecutions for breaches of the Act. If there are any breaches the employes are to blame for not complaining; they do not appear to realise that the Act is for their benefit, but treat it in a half hostile manner.

BUILDING TRADE.

During the year the building trade has been busy. The Catholic Church and other buildings partly completed during the previous year were finished. The Anglican and Wesleyan denominations have each built a handsome place of worship, and other buildings have been erected and are in the course of erection, amongst the latter being commodious offices for the Eketahuna Road