

UNSKILLED LABOUR.

I have only had one applicant for work as yet this year, which speaks well for the place. Of course, a number have been employed hop-picking, &c. There are a good many local men employed repairing the Government wharf at the Port, Nelson.

In conclusion, I might say that the Factory Acts and Shops and Shop-assistants Act are very well observed here.

I have, &c.,

ROBT. KELLY, Inspector of Factories.

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

BLENHEIM.

SIR,—

Police-station, Blenheim, 1st April, 1899.

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

Again I have to report a satisfactory return for this district. The period under review has been one of increased prosperity, and it is generally agreed that there is a decided contrast between present conditions and those existing in past years. The success of the agricultural and pastoral industries has been one of the main factors in this advancement. The harvest of 1898 was an exceptionally rich one—a good yield and especially first-class prices—bringing about a marked revival in the welfare of the district. It is looked upon as a record harvest, and as having enabled many of the smaller farmers to clear off or lessen old obligations, and place themselves upon a better footing. Correspondingly, there was an improvement in trade circles and in the labour-market.

The pastoral season was a good one, the weather being favourable for the back-country, and the wool-clip was heavy. The harvest now being dealt with is expected to turn out a fair one. An unusually large area of land was cropped, and at first there was a magnificent prospect, but there was general wetness during the latter portion of the season. A lot of grain was spoilt and some destroyed, although a considerable quantity escaped. Another important consideration is that the prices for grain this season are low. Therefore, although the harvest is a good one, it is not regarded as equal to the previous record one in its worth to the district. It is satisfactory to report that though the rainfall was exceptionally heavy the district escaped floods, which have caused such havoc in past years. Only a small portion of the district (at the lower end), with a few crops, suffered from the flood, while the town was not flooded at all. This is owing to the extensive river-conservation and protective works that have been carried out lately and are now in progress.

The labour-market has never been in better condition than it has been during the term under review. At times during the busy portion of the harvesting season labour was at a premium. The most important feature of the labour-market is the progress of the co-operative work of forming the railway-line from Blenheim to the Awatere. This undertaking was commenced during the year, and it has given employment to a considerable number of men. The number now employed consists of eighty co-operatives, four artisans, and six day-men, bringing up the total to ninety men. The first preference was given to local married men. The large majority of those employed are local residents, but a few come from other places. The formation of the line is proceeding satisfactorily, and the character of the work meets with the approval of the engineers. The average rate of pay is about 6s. 6d. a day, and the men are generally satisfied. A complaint has been made in two or three letters to the public Press of the smallness of the wages obtained by some of the men, but it has not created any attention. It is apparent that the men generally recognise that by fair and reasonable exertion they obtain a fair wage. No doubt the work will continue for some considerable time, and, with the contract for erecting the Awatere Railway-bridge, which is now being offered, will keep the labour-market in good circumstances.

The prospects of the settlement of the Starborough Estate, recently purchased by the Government, and of the establishment of railway-communication with the Awatere, is welcomed. The recent clearing sale of live-stock and station implements on Starborough attracted a large number of people, and the forty thousand sheep (the bulk of which went south) were disposed of at excellent prices. The business of the sheep-market this season, with its high prices, is worth noting.

The industries existing in this district have been progressing on even terms. No new ventures of any consequence have been started. There is nothing of exceptional note to report in connection with the rising industry.

The accommodation provided for shearers on the stations has been excellent, excepting in one case, in which I gave notice of requirements, which have been fulfilled.

The number of factories and workrooms registered during January reached sixty-five, and I am pleased to say they gave no trouble as regards registering. The number of hands employed consists of 251 males and sixteen females, showing an increase of fifty-one males and four females, also an increase of five factories. This is owing to a few flax-mills which have started in the district. No serious accidents have occurred in the factories during the year.

There have been no complaints or prosecutions during the year. I may state that the Act has been well observed on both sides.

I have, &c.,

E. Tregear, Esq., Wellington.

T. H. PRICE, Inspector of Factories.