

It will be seen that, in addition to the animals remaining of those originally supplied by the Board, now in the possession of the crofters, they have acquired 58 horses, 51 oxen, 82 cows, 63 heifers, 18 steers, 31 bulls, and 92 pigs. The number of chickens and other poultry owned by the various families is 1,484. These figures show a satisfactory increase over the previous year, while, as will be seen from the returns, the increase as compared with 1890 is remarkable. Some of the horses and horned stock are believed to be encumbered by mortgages, but the larger proportion, especially of the latter, are reported by the agent as belonging to the wives or younger members of the families.

The families in the settlement have cut 749 tons of hay, rather less than was prepared in 1894, for the use of the stock during the winter.

In the report last year it was mentioned that a proportion of the homesteads in the settlement had been nominally sold by the Municipality for taxes. It became necessary for the Board to pay those taxes on behalf of the crofters, in order to maintain its security. If this had not been done the nominal sales would have become a reality, the crofters would have been ejected from their holdings, and the land would have passed into the hands of new owners.

Acting on the instructions of the Treasury, the crofters were informed that, unless they made certain payments to the Board in November, on account of overdue instalments and of the unpaid taxes foreclosure proceedings would be commenced. Some payments were made as the result, but they were little more than nominal, and the lawyers were instructed to take action with a view to enable the Board to gain possession of the lands.

The object the Board has in view is not the ejectment of the settlers, but to obtain possession of the lands; and then under a new arrangement to lease them to the crofters. The intention is that the repayments in the form of rent should be spread over a number of years, and be a first charge upon the crops and chattels of the crofters. A measure of the kind will, it is believed, commend itself to the crofters, as it possesses many advantages from their standpoint.

During the year a delegation from the settlement waited upon the Secretary for Scotland to explain the position of the crofters. They referred to the large indebtedness they had incurred in addition to their obligations to the Board. They pointed out that year by year judgments were obtained against them, and that in view of the expenses incurred, and of the large interest they had to pay, all their earnings, or nearly all, were swept away annually to satisfy their creditors, without decreasing, to any considerable degree, the extent of their obligations. This is not only a serious matter for them personally, but it makes it almost impossible for them to repay the money advanced by the Board.

The delegates were informed that they had better endeavour to arrange a compromise with their creditors, and that if it were very feasible the matter might be taken into consideration by the Board, with a view to see if arrangements were possible by which the settlement could again be placed in a sound financial condition.

The delegates represented that certain of the crofters were also in need of seed grain, and, in response to these urgent representations, the Treasury authorised the expenditure of a sum not exceeding 200*l.* for the purpose. It is believed, however, that the whole of this amount was not expended.

There appears to have been some dissatisfaction in the settlement, on the part of the crofters, in regard to various matters; but inquiry has shown that the grievances largely arose from the non-payment of the municipal taxes, and advances for seed grain, and from the steps which were taken by the local authorities, and by the Board to protect their respective interests.

The position of the various families in the settlement, their liabilities to the Board, and to other creditors, and the extreme consideration shown to them by the Board since the date the settlements were formed, were so fully mentioned in the last report that it is unnecessary to refer to them again in detail.

#### *The Saltcoats Settlement.*

There are 14 families at Saltcoats, and 8 younger members of the families who have taken up land, making altogether 22 settlers. The settlement contains about 90 persons. They had 162 acres under cultivation, and during the year had breaking, or land in summer fallow, to the extent of 29 acres, or a grand total of 191 acres, as compared with 272 acres in the preceding year. The value of the various crops in 1895 was \$1,391 as compared with \$652 in 1894.