

prised the European freehold land and the Crown leaseholds. Under the Act the whole of the area is liable for the cost of the drainage operations, if it can be shown that benefit is derived therefrom.

Between 1894 and 1910 the Rangitaiki Land Drainage Board endeavoured to grapple with the difficulties before them. After obtaining the advice of well-known engineers, schemes of drainage were devised and over £5,000 spent in carrying them out, but from various causes they were not very successful, and it was evident that the problem would have to be solved in a different manner.

Owing to the success of the Government drainage operations in the Hauraki Plains, which comprised somewhat similar country to the Rangitaiki Plains, the settlers and Drainage Board approached the Government with a view to the necessary works being undertaken by the Government. After consideration of their representations, it was decided to test the feeling of the settlers, and a public meeting of all residents was called at Te Teko on the 7th June, 1910, which was attended by the Under-Secretary of Lands on behalf of the Government. The position of affairs was explained by him to those present, and a resolution was then unanimously passed requesting the Government to pass a special Bill to enable Government officers to conduct the necessary drainage operations in place of the existing Board, and to strike a special rate on all property within the district to defray all expenditure. The Board also held a special meeting and passed a similar resolution, and a petition was circulated and signed by almost every ratepayer praying that the Rangitaiki Land Drainage Board should be abolished and the control of operations taken over by the Government.

As the result of the meeting and the expressed wish of the settlers, a special Bill was drafted and introduced into Parliament, and passed during the session of 1910. Its chief provisions are as follow:—

The Rangitaiki Land Drainage District is abolished, and the Board dissolved, as from the 1st August, 1910. From that date the Minister of Lands is to construct and carry on such works as he thinks fit for the drainage, reclamation, and roading of the land described in the Act. The land subject to the Act is identical with the former drainage district.

The Minister is authorized to raise not more than £50,000 for drainage purposes, and to levy a rate upon the settlers in the district to pay the interest thereon, as well as a sinking fund to pay off such loans. All lands are liable to rating except Native settlements not exceeding 50 acres in extent and lands deriving no benefit from the operations. To enable lands to be rated they have previously to be classified by two arbitrators, one appointed by the Minister and the other by the occupiers of land in the district; and in the event of their disagreement, an umpire, to be mutually chosen, is to decide such questions. Power to take land for necessary drainage and other purposes is given by the Act, and "thirds" accruing on Crown leaseholds in the district are to be paid to, and expended by, the Minister of Lands instead of by the Whakataane County Council. These "thirds" are for the purpose of forming and constructing roads. Finally, it is enacted that a report on the administration of the Act is to be submitted to Parliament, together with a statement of accounts, within thirty days from the commencement of the next ensuing session after the 31st March in each year.

The preliminary steps undertaken were a thorough inspection of the district by the Under-Secretary of Lands, in company with Mr. J. B. Thompson, Engineer in charge of the Hauraki Plains drainage. As the result of this inspection, a general scheme of operations was drawn up, and is set forth in Appendix herewith. In order to carry on the operations satisfactorily, it was decided that Mr. Thompson (whose headquarters remain at the Hauraki Plains) should be the Consulting Engineer for the Rangitaiki drainage, and prepare the necessary plans and specifications from time to time and be responsible for the proper execution of the work, but that Mr. O. N. Campbell, an assistant surveyor of the Department of Lands, should be in local charge of the works and have his headquarters at the works. The first work of importance to be undertaken being the cutting through the Ohorero Bend of the Rangitaiki River to enable a straight cut to be made from the river to the sea, the office and headquarters were established there, and connected by telephone with Matata.

The first work to be undertaken was the taking of levels for various positions on the swamp and plains, and Messrs. J. B. Thompson and O. N. Campbell quickly obtained the desired particulars. The general scheme of drainage was then drawn up (as already stated), and it was decided that the cutting-through of the Ohorero Bend should take precedence. To enable the canal to be excavated promptly it was deemed best to keep the work distinct from the operations about to be carried out by the Department, and tenders were publicly invited for the contract. The tenders sent in, however, being far above the Engineer's estimate, none of them were accepted, and in January, 1911, it was decided to let the contract for excavation to Messrs. Rich and Jeffreys, civil engineers, of Auckland, for the sum of £11,123, the work to be completed within twenty months from commencement.

The ceremony of turning the first sod of the proposed excavation was performed by the Hon. Roderick McKenzie, Minister of Public Works, acting on behalf of the Right Hon. the Minister of Lands, early in March, 1911, in presence of a large attendance of the settlers, and the contractors have now started the work and are making steady progress.

By the end of the year ended 31st March last only preliminary work had been accomplished by the Department of Lands, but in next year's report the Land Drainage Engineer will be in a position to furnish particulars of the clearing of existing drains, the cutting of new drains, deviation of roads, snagging of the Rangitaiki River, and the many other operations that are needed to insure the proper and systematic draining of the Rangitaiki Plains. All this work is well in train, and there is every prospect of a successful year having been entered upon.