

The Ahuwhenua Trophy, presented by the Right Hon. Viscount Bledisloe during his term of office in New Zealand for annual competition among Maori settlers occupying land under the various Native development schemes, was awarded this year to a dairy-farmer at Horohoro, near Rotorua. In stating that the first two contestants were outstanding examples of farmers who had applied themselves intelligently to the task of developing their holdings, the judge commented favourably upon the general standard reached by the competitors, and emphasized the importance of making more provision for shelter either by tree-planting or preservation of Native bush, herd-testing with rigorous culling of stock, correct methods of pig husbandry, and the conservation of winter feed.

It is hoped that one important result of facilitating the settlement of Native land will be the gradual solution of the vexed problem of local rating. Believing that it is neither equitable nor just to the Maori race that its birthright should be whittled away through non-payment of rates on areas which in the past have lain idle, the Government is reluctant to agree to the enforcement of rating charges by sale until such time as the particular Native has had a reasonable chance of obtaining from his land the necessary revenue to meet living-expenses, farm maintenance, and interest and rates—or, in other words, until he has had the opportunity of using his land to good advantage through the provision of financial assistance and expert farming guidance. In return, the State expects that the Maori should fulfil his obligations as a citizen, and pay his share of all taxation. Time is, of course, an essential element in bringing land into productivity, but it is confidently hoped that the progress being made in this direction will result in a considerable improvement in this matter.

The question of granting leases to Native occupiers under the State's development plan, in order to provide security of tenure, has been under consideration by the Board for some time past, but is proving a difficult problem owing to the varied circumstances of the different schemes and the complex character of the titles involved. Areas included in the farm settlement projects comprise Native lands, Crown lands, European lands acquired by Natives, and similar lands which have been purchased by the Board, and, although the greater portion subject to development is Native freehold, the position is further confused by the fact that the titles to this class of land are in many cases in the process of consolidation for the purpose of grouping scattered interests into economic holdings. To a layman such intricacy of titles is bewildering, but the Board, after considering opinions submitted by Judges of the Court, hopes in the near future to be in a position to grant satisfactory tenures to the successful occupiers of individual farms.

Substantial progress has been made in improving the housing-conditions of the Maori people, and under the provisions of the Native Housing Act, 1935, and its amendment of 1938, the Department, in collaboration with the Public Works Department, is proceeding steadily with the erection, repair, alteration, or improvement of Native dwellings, and the provision of amenities in the nature of adequate water-supplies and sanitation. Recent surveys of Native villages and settlements throughout the country disclose the fact that the housing-accommodation of the people presents a serious problem, and many are living in habitations unfit for human occupation. The vivid comparison and contrast between the type of dwelling now being provided and the dilapidated and overcrowded shacks which previously served as homes may be seen from the photographs presented in this and former reports. The three methods, all of which are based on the principle of repayable advances, under which improved housing is made available to the Maori are as follow: Firstly, dwellings erected on development scheme lands; secondly, loans to Natives on mortgagable securities for the purpose of erecting new or repairing existing houses; and, thirdly, the provision of cottages for indigent Maoris, whose means of repayment are usually assignments deemed insufficient security for loan purposes. The houses erected, purchased, or repaired up to the 31st March, 1939, with the figures for the previous financial year in parentheses, numbered 1,134 (679), classified as follow: Under development schemes, 937 (654); under the Housing Act, 74 (13); and under the Special Native Housing Fund established for the needs of indigent Natives, 123 (12). Although these measures to ameliorate the living