

NEW ZEALAND IN PERIL.

IT has been suggested that New Zealanders sometimes are not over-quick to see possibilities, that no matter how urgent a matter may be they take a long while and much persuasion before the necessity for action is apparent to them. Of course, such an allegation may be warmly resented by many New Zealanders, but it is a well-known fact that in certain vital matters the people, in the mass, are not easily roused. Indeed it has required a disaster occasionally to make them take notice.

The recent tragedy at Kopuawhara, where a great wave of water suddenly came down the river and engulfed the sleeping occupants of a Public Works camp can be cited as an instance. There is important evidence to indicate that the extraordinary sudden abnormal wave was traceable to the short-sighted cutting of the forest on the watershed of this river. The long-delayed sequel was a land-slide which, in combination with debris and logs, blocked the river for a time. Suddenly, however, the water overcame the obstruction and swept down the river bed in an overwhelming wave.

Like the wave of water, public opinion suddenly rose and in a similar manner quickly subsided. Will the Hawkes Bay lesson be also disregarded?

The possibilities of like disasters almost anywhere in this forest-denuded land, with its gorges and mountains, did not occur to the majority of people. Yet the way has been prepared for similar revenge of Mother Nature from one end of the country to the other.

Of course, persons who are interested in cutting down the remnant of the highland forests for their own particular ends will glibly say that floods have happened in New Zealand from time immemorial. So they have, but not in the same manner as they do to-day. When this country was forest-clad, rises and falls in rivers were slow; a longer time was taken to run surplus water away. What a change the blunders of man have made. Surely readers of the daily papers should begin to be alarmed by the frequent flooding of rivers, which quickly surge over their banks after heavy rain. Let us not forget, too, that it is this ten or fifteen per cent. of water which the river channel is unable to carry in flood time that causes the damage to the surrounding land, the destruction of bridges and much other loss.

It is well known by many observers that, if a survey of the erosion conditions in New Zealand was made by an expert not materially interested in local forest matters and in no manner influenced or trammelled by persons concerned in forest exploitation, the report would stagger New Zealanders and would show that Australia's erosion by wind and America's wind and water troubles, bad as they are, would be light in proportion to area.

At present many of the people of New Zealand are too prone to see the mote in the other person's eye and fail to realise that the bigger one is in theirs. In other words they do not see the possibilities, but some day they will be forced painfully to recognise the truth of these words of the great Leonard Cockayne: "When erosion assumes the mastery man is helpless." Will New Zealanders sleep on and continue to permit the destruction of the remnant of our upland forest, and then, like the lady driving a car