

FLOODS AND EROSION. WORK BACK TO FIRST CAUSES.

Hawke's Bay is in a peculiarly unfortunate position geographically, at the mercy of the rivers. So far the land-protection measures adopted have been the building of stopbanks and other engineering works to confine the lower parts of the rivers in their courses and clear the outlets to the sea. But at last the local authorities and the Government appear to have become convinced that the whole problem of protection from flood in the Hawke's Bay area must be tackled. It required a major disaster to rouse them. But a mere local survey and protection scheme is not nearly enough. This is a great national question. River control and soil protection concern the whole Dominion. Man has made such a mess of the country, originally so well clothed and guarded by Nature, that reclamation measures on the grand scale are a nationwide responsibility. The first duty is to make a thorough scientific survey of the whole of the areas. The Government geologists and public works engineers should examine the whole of the country, make an estimate of the huge quantities of soil washed down from the hills and spread over the plains, and work back to first causes.

Some people have attributed the enormous amount of washdown to the loosening of the hills by the earthquake of 1931. That theory is symptomatic of the general inability to see further than immediate surroundings and recent happenings. The earthquake cannot be blamed for everything, neither can the so-called cloud-

bursts. Immediately after the Tarawera eruption in 1886 the Government had surveys made of the country most affected, and Mr. S. Percy Smith and Professor Thomas (the late Sir Algernon) wrote excellent reports, which were published. That was a disaster of a thousand years; it is not likely to recur, in our time—although it is not wise to prophecy. But this flood danger is ever present in New Zealand, in one place and another, or in many places at once. It is most important, and urgent, that the country should be told exactly why and how this flood and ruin occurred.

For years upon years the Government, one Government after another, has been urged to tackle this flood danger and this land ruin. Now that a "major disaster" has at last occurred the job of planning for the future must not be dealt with in bits and pieces. The whole face of New Zealand, more particularly this North Island, should be viewed and reviewed. All the high steep country must be protected absolutely; there is no other course for the safety of the land. It does not matter whether the highlands are owned by the State or by private interests; private rights can be required to give way to the national needs. It is very obvious to all who use their eyes that those who opened up high or steep land for the sheep farmers who cleared and burnt every scrap of native vegetation on the hills are among the country's worst enemies.

Editorial Note:—Since this was written the Government has announced that a report on a comprehensive scheme of river control and soil and forest protection is to be given attention.

*Debris Moving Down
to River.*

