

# BALANCING BUDGETS.

---

## THE DRIFT TO DISASTER.

---

THE balancing of an annual budget means that the taxes imposed upon the community have been sufficient to meet the expenses incurred by the Government in administration, maintenance of works, payment of interest on loans, etc. A credit balance is only an indication of national prosperity in that the people have been able to pay the taxes levied. The balancing of a budget, however, cannot be taken as an indication of continued prosperity because the wherewithal to pay taxes is only too frequently obtained at the expense of the future. For instance, if our essential protection forests are exploited, with no attempt at replacement, or if gold is won, as it only too frequently is, by the total loss of fertile soil, which would have produced food and other needs for centuries, then it will be evident that budget balancing is merely an indication of temporary prosperity. The penalty will come later.

The budget of our natural resources has, unfortunately, never shown a credit balance since the white man landed in this country. Our native forests have been often exploited to the advantage of a few, with no idea of a continuing crop; as a result, the food-producing top soil, our most essential natural resource, is being carried towards and into the sea. Our rivers have gone awry and are spreading stony debris on each side of their banks and choking their beds. The result is that they periodically change their courses and continue the process of depositing debris over our food-producing lands.

With a view to remedying this last national menace, let us look for the source of the evil. This originates, of course, on the uplands, where the natural covering has been destroyed. The downward movement of the soil on the higher parts of the hill country is caused by innumerable trickles of water forcing the soil before them, causing sheet erosion. The tramping of stock, wind and slips or earth-slides are all contributing factors.

In simple words, the meagre top soil covering our hill country is always moving down, but never uphill. When the countless little tricklets, each forcing down some soil or debris combine, their volume and power are greatly increased, thus causing gullies and gashes to be torn away. All this water and debris, soon or late, reaches the many streams that feed a river, which is then called upon to carry a sudden abnormal volume of water and debris.

Thus the channel becomes congested, and the river overflows its banks, carries away bridges and causes ever-recurring and ever-increasing damage. An important factor, not always realised, is that the silt moving downwards on the hard forest-bare hills, chokes the natural entrances to vast underground reservoirs, which normally would have a very valuable function in temporarily retaining surplus water. Therefore the surplus flow augments the great volume of water which has to be suddenly moved to the sea.

The remedy for this one great cause of the depletion of our most vital natural resource is, of course, the conservation of the existing plant covering of the high and