

PLANNED EROSION

IN a thousand years, if New Zealand is still above water, school-children (who will talk science then instead of football and films) will argue about the Kanieri and Totara Flat corru-

LOST LAND

gations as we do about the Moeraki boulders. Since most of them will not be able to read what is now called English, they will not know that their ancestors in the first half of the 20th Century lay awake at night brooding over the loss of soil by wind and rain and by day deliberately dredged it away into the sea. The long curving ridges they will detect between 42 degrees and 43 degrees South and 170 degrees and 172 degrees East they will probably attribute to rhythmical earth movements, glacial action, or periodic floods and droughts. They may even search for a lost civilisation, and with all the confidence of their continuing ignorance discover buried homes and terraced gardens. Absurder things have been done in the name of science in our own day, and since the human race, however

it changes its language and its tools, is not likely in so short a time to increase its capacity to think, there is very little chance that it will be capable in a thousand years of reconstructing its past with accuracy. Foolish though it will still be, it will be no more expert or folly than fools usually are, and no more likely to light on our present dredging folly than a man working on atom bombs is to light on the true story of the Siberian meteorite.

Some such nonsense as this passed through my mind as I loitered in Kanieri, drove along the Ahaura Flats, and approached Ikamatua. I was not shocked by what I saw, since I am a native of the gold belt of Otago, and have lived through three wars. Nor should I have been enraged, since a man in his sixties can't afford a brain storm every time he blunders into a booby trap for his complacency. It would have been better to remember for what a short time the human race has been human anywhere, and how amazing it is that in its first mad hour in New Zealand it has done so little damage that time will not repair. I can, and do

remember things like those sometimes, but I did not try to remember them on Totara Flat where hundreds of acres of the very best land in Westland are being systematically destroyed. It would be an outrage if Westland were as wide as it is long, and all good soil. But it is a thin strip of sour and swampy soil, with small areas of high fertility here and there. I saw nothing anywhere as good as those flats on the way to Ikamatua, and in a few years there may be nothing of them left. There will be nothing if their life depends on the amount of gold they hide.

I DON'T feel like blaming the mining companies, who, no doubt, bought the land at a fair price. Eleven pounds an acre I was told was paid for one

block, and although it is to-day worth more than twice that amount for farming alone, eleven pounds must have seemed a fair price when the deal was made or it would not have been accepted. (continued on next page)



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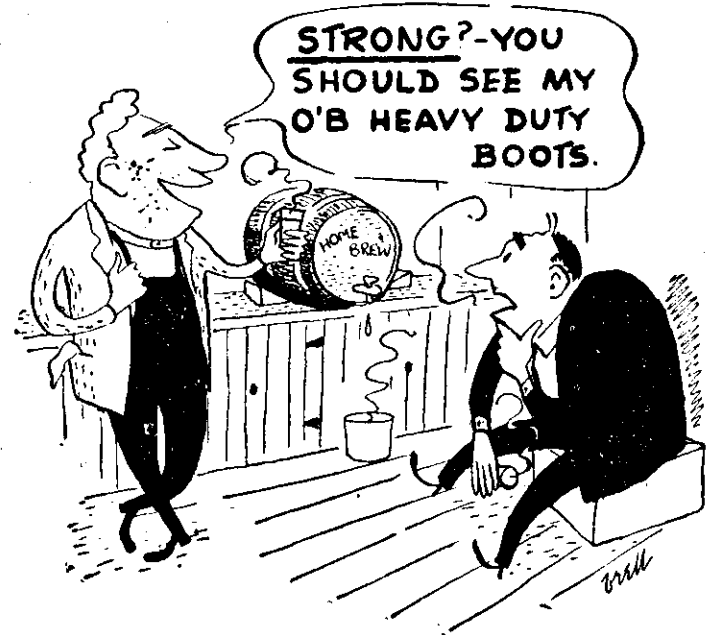
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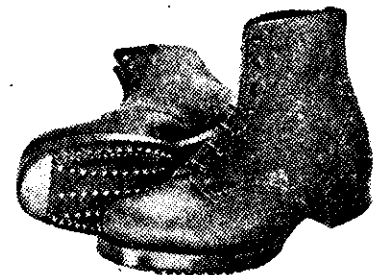
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