



LEFT: The great Tarawera eruption of 1886, as recorded in a contemporary sketch

cent. of 1947-49, lasted longest. It caused 77 deaths—fewer than the first epidemic of 1915-16, but more than the outbreak of 1936-37. Less well known are several outbreaks of smallpox. One of these gave Christchurch such a fright in 1904 that between 15,000 and 16,000 people were vaccinated in a fortnight.

The Raetihi bush fire, as listeners will hear, was spread rapidly by a cyclone, included in its destruction much property besides bush, and took the lives of three people. Probably the only bush fire before or since that can be compared with it travelled over more than half a million acres in 1946. In this area of destruction were nearly 33,000 acres of exotic and about 10,000 acres of indigenous forest. Losses were heaviest in the Rotorua district. The wages alone of the 14,000 men who fought the blaze totalled about £50,000. No deaths were caused directly by the fire, though several lost their lives through misadventure.

Bad weather is the most common of the natural causes of damage to property in New Zealand. The programme listeners will hear about the Clutha flood of 1863 recalls one of the most disastrous storms in our history, but damage by flood, wind, snowfall and the like is so common that a schoolboy can remember many occasions when it occurred. The most recent flood with tragic consequences swept down the Tangiwai River last Christmas Eve—a flood which normally might have done relatively little damage. A little further back was the Waikato flood, reckoned the most extensive since 1907, and flooding in the Manawatu district which invited comparisons with floods in the same area more than 50 years before. Wairarapa had the worst floods for years in 1947, and the Hawke's Bay floods of 1938 were a reminder to those who recalled the torrential rains of 1924—20 inches in ten and a half hours—that Nature can strike twice in the same place. Between these two came the great gale of February, 1936, which caused damage in many parts of the North Island—perhaps the most widespread of any destructive storm since records have been kept. Heavy snowfalls also have been experienced in re-

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FOUR DISASTERS

NATURE IN FOUR MOODS is the theme and title of a series of documentary programmes about New Zealand to be broadcast from YA and YZ stations during the next few months. To illustrate their theme Cecil and Celia Manson, the authors, have chosen the Wellington earthquake of 1848, the Tarawera eruption of 1886, the Clutha flood of 1863, and the Raetihi bush fire of 1918. But Nature, like man, has many moods, and has frequently been moody in the short period of European settlement in New Zealand.

An earthquake and the year 1848 are good starting points for any glance at natural disaster in New Zealand, for (though we like it said in a whisper overseas) earthquakes do occur rather frequently in New Zealand—there were 74 destructive shakes from 1835 to 1950—and the one that shook Wellington in 1848 was quite a big one. Seven years later there was another in the Cook Strait area which, on the evidence available, would probably have been heavier on today's instrument scale than the one that killed 255 people in Hawke's Bay in 1931. And down the years there have been others which could have caused heavy loss of life if they had been centred in more heavily populated areas—for in-

stance, in 1904, 1929 (when 17 people were killed), 1934 and 1942. Tarawera, with a death roll of 101, is the only volcanic eruption in recent times that has caused heavy loss of life, though ten people were killed at White Island in 1914 when the side of the crater blew out and buried the sulphur works.

If an epidemic of disease can be called a natural disaster, the influenza epidemic of 1918 is our greatest, for in a short time it caused the death of about 6700 people. Periodic outbreaks of poliomyelitis are our other best remembered epidemics. The most destructive of the four major outbreaks since 1915 caused the death of 195 people in 1924-25, though the most re-



SOME hint of the beauty lost in the Tarawera eruption is given in this old photograph of the Pink Terraces now far below the surface of Rotomahana



CELIA AND CECIL MANSON, who have written four programmes around historic disasters