



reached its peak in daylight and settlers, marooned on the roofs of their houses, or in hay-lofts, were rescued by boat. Stock losses were, however, very heavy, settlers having no chance to get their stock on to the hill country in time.

The Road Back

THE Esk Valley to-day resembles in many respects a corner of battle-scarred Flanders during the war years. The mounds of silt piled up by the settlers in clearing a way to their homes and the general litter and flood wreckage spread across the surface of the silt strengthen this illusion.

In the past, the valley was not only noted for its scenic beauties; it was recognised, too, as the home of some

A familiar scene in the Esk Valley to-day. Driftwood and debris of every description, piled high by the flood waters, bar the way to this farm homestead.

THREE years ago, when in Hawke's Bay, I visited a farm in the fertile and picturesque Esk Valley, to look at one of the heaviest crops of pumpkins ever grown in the Bay. It was a property of which any farmer would be proud and reflected everywhere the keenness and hard work of its owner. Not only could he boast of a bumper pumpkin crop. He had also some certified perennial ryegrass and white clover pastures that were a pleasure to look upon.

I paid my second visit to that farm—or rather to its site—a fortnight ago. Of this year's successor to that bumper pumpkin crop there was nothing to be seen. With many others in that unhappy valley, it had been swept out to sea. The whip-clean pastures that had been the owner's pride had similarly disappeared, buried completely and hopelessly beneath a blanket of coarse, sandy silt, varying in depth from about three to 10 feet. Piled high atop the silt, where the retreating flood-waters had left it, was a hopeless tangle of driftwood, probably some hundreds of tons—a more desolate sight it would be hard to imagine. Only the tops of the posts of one of the original fence lines, protruding a few inches from the silt, gave any clue to the fact that what had been a fully improved farm lay beneath all this desolation.

I found the farmer busy inside the modern homestead he had built some 18 months ago. To get into that homestead after the flood-waters had subsided, he and his family had had to dig through five feet of silt, piled up against walls and windows. As we approached his home, all that could be seen was the roof, protruding a few feet above the banked-up silt that had been dug out to allow of access.

At the time of our visit—two and a half months after the disaster—there was still a moat of water, some two feet deep, all round the house. In the flood-stained interior, the owner was busy ripping out wall linings. It is his intention to pull down the whole

LIKE WAR-SCARRED FLANDERS

house and to have it re-erected on the shingle beach about half a mile distant. The task will have to be pushed ahead with, for already some of the submerged timbers are showing signs of rotting.

Back Behind Scratch

TO use his own words to me, that particular farmer is back further to-day than when he started farming, and his lot is broadly paralleled by that of dozens of other farmers in the area. They are all facing the task of breaking in anew every square inch of land they possess, and with the problem of providing as speedily as possible a cover of pasture on a silt blanket which, for fertility, does not come within a mile of comparing with their original alluvial soils, some of the most fertile in Hawke's Bay.

Settlers in this picturesque tree-lined Valley—favoured picnic spot for years with Napier residents—have had their share of floods in the past, but never before has a major flood disaster of the magnitude of that of April last visited the area. The Esk Valley as we knew it is no more. In the wake of the flood waters was left a wilderness of silt, dotted with half-buried buildings and trees.

The story of the disaster was fully told in the daily Press at the time, so there is no need to repeat it. It suffices to say that when the waters of the swollen Esk River, bottled up at the mouth by debris brought down in their torrential race seaward, finally burst through to the sea and got away, they left a legacy in a covering of silt, varying in depth from two to ten feet, over some 2000 acres—about 90 per cent. of the flat land in the entire valley. With practically no warning of the phenomenal rise in the river, it is nothing short of a miracle that there was no loss of life. Fortunately the flood

Settlers Face up to Heart-Breaking Task In Flood Devastated Esk Valley

By T. G. Tyrer



DIGGING OUT HIS LAWN WITH A SCOOP.

This settler has two teams drawing scoops on the job in an effort to remove the five feet deep blanket of silt from the immediate vicinity of his homestead.

really efficient farming, and the men who, within the course of a few short hours, at Nature's whim, saw the work of years wiped out and replaced by a wilderness, are with commendable courage, proving true to label. I realised this when I saw what had been accomplished in the two months and a half since the disaster. With ready and welcome assistance from the Government in certain definite directions, the settlers in the valley have lost no time in tackling the job of rehabilitating themselves and in laying the foundations for a sole of grass on the silt blanket cloaking their original pastures.

How Help Is Being Given

THERE were two obvious angles from which assistance to the flood sufferers had to be granted, firstly the personal angle and secondly the farming angle. The whole problem of flood relief has been handled by a special committee comprising the local members of Parliament, representatives of several Government departments, and of local bodies, and, of course, representatives of the settlers themselves. The committee was set up immediately following the disaster and meets frequently, to deal with all requests for assistance,



Not a trench on the battlefields, but a corner of a cow-yard in the Esk Valley, excavated bodily from its silt cover. Mr. R. B. Tennent, Director of the Fields Division, is seen (right) in this photograph with Mr. R. P. Hill, Instructor in Agriculture (centre). Left: Showing a strainer from a buried fence line, with a newly erected fence in the background.

dealing with each case on its individual merits and granting assistance in the form of a loan, covered with a promissory note.

There are, of course, as there always be in cases of emergency, anomalies. It seems hard, for instance, that the man who has been left as well as hard working, and who has put by a small amount of capital for an emergency, cannot receive the measure of assistance as his neighbours who are without capital, but it is a difficulty repeatedly met with in relief measures are taken following a national disaster, and it is difficult to see just how it can be satisfactorily solved. In this case, the Government lost no time in aiding those settlers who were left totally unprepared for the emergency with sustenance and providing them with unemployed labour to assist with the stupendous task

of clearing and rehabilitating their properties.

Re-Seeding Pushed Ahead

VARIOUS Government departments have played their respective parts in the scheme for accelerated rehabilitation. The first task was obviously the regrassing of the silt blanket at the earliest possible moment, and in this direction the Fields Division of the Department of Agriculture gave invaluable assistance, having been given authority to arrange for the purchase and early distribution of seed for this purpose. This was no easy job, but thanks to the organising ability and leadership of the Director of the Division, Mr. R. B. Tennent, backed up by his field officers in the area, some 6000 bushels of certified perennial ryegrass and some 6000lb. of certified white clover have to date been distributed for sowing in the area, while some 2000 bushels of rye and 2000lb. of clover seed have been absorbed for



use in the Tanguio and Puketapu Valleys and in parts of the Wairoa district where heavy silting occurred. The task of providing relief from this angle in these latter areas has been ably handled by the fields instructors of the Lands Department.

From previous experience, after the whole of the area had been inspected by officers of the Fields Division, it was decided that even at such a late stage in the season the best way to handle resowing was to make an immediate start wherever possible as soon as the flood waters receded. Under Hawke's Bay conditions, with occasional dry springs, it would be far too risky to wait for the spring for the sowing of the area. Since ploughing is impossible on the area, owing to the litter lying close to the surface, there was further danger of weed growth coming away and presenting a major problem if the land were not grassed as speedily as possible.

Accordingly, the task was tackled as

far as possible just as soon as the flood waters receded. Here the Public Works Department came to the rescue with a team of tractors and levelling implements to level out the surface of the silt, in many cases left in waves and terraces by the retreating flood waters. The job of allocating the seed supplies was capably handled by Mr. R. P. Hill, Instructor in Agriculture, on the Hastings staff of the Fields Division, and when I visited Hawke's Bay, in company with Mr. R. B. Tennent, Director of the Fields Division, this officer was in the midst of another job—that of allocating supplies of fencing materials for the replacement of fences, practically all of which were buried either partially or completely beneath the silt. Many miles of fencing were also carried away by wholesale slips on the hill country.

A sum of £10,000 has been allocated by the Government for this phase of rehabilitation and the Fields Division has been given the job of making the



A LONG PULL AND A STRONG PULL.

The lorry fitted with a home-made winding gear for the salvage of buried fence posts is here seen hitched on to a strainer.