

GENERAL.

Several of the minor consolidation schemes have been completed and orders made grouping together in compact areas the interests which are scattered over numerous blocks of land. A number of the larger schemes are still in abeyance, partly due to the difficulty of providing for the liquidation of liabilities for surveys, the cost of which in difficult country often outweighs the value of the land. This has to some extent been overcome by a conference, consisting of the heads of the Treasury, Lands, and Native Departments, which has taken stock and has made recommendations for alleviating the difficulty and lessening the burdens on the lands.

The main activity of the Department has been in promoting the development of land owned or occupied by the Maoris. The Department was granted by Parliament the sum of £77,770 for such purposes. As a consequence, the schemes reported last year have been extended, and at 31st March last there were twenty-nine schemes in progress. The main details of their progress will be submitted in a separate report to Parliament. It is patent to even a casual observer that the hope of being able to utilize their own lands has put fresh life and vigour into the Maori race. Forty years ago the late Sir James Carroll (a member of that race) penned words that were pregnant with truth when he pleaded that Parliament should not omit to devise means for encouraging and assisting the Maoris to become useful settlers. This, he said, could be done if the Maoris were afforded facilities for rendering productive the lands they already possessed, whereas no attempt had theretofore been made to educate them in acquiring industrial knowledge or to direct their attention to industrial pursuits. This is the policy that is now being followed out. Civilization brought to the Maori many blessings, but we are too apt to forget that they were extremely expensive benefits to the Maori people—a race with ample lands, but no money to pay for its proper utilization and development. Those who hold farm lands to-day can visualize their present helplessness in the face of a world-wide economic crisis as being the chronic position of the Maori people. It is frankly admitted that there have been cases where Maoris have sold part of their land and have spent the proceeds foolishly for want of proper guidance and control. Now that a concerted attempt is being made to educate them to acquire industrial knowledge and to undertake responsibilities in farming their land under proper supervision by the supply of their needs for fencing-material, manures, and stock, they themselves supplying the necessary labour, it is hoped that habits of thrift and caution will come with it. An illustration of the enthusiasm upon the subject is instanced in the young Maori who wrote to the Department asking that he might be supplied with a translation into the Maori language of all there was to learn about farming so that he could study it in anticipation of the time when he would receive assistance. The only drawback is the limit of finance, but possibly in the early stages this has its advantages in that only those who have proved themselves can be given assistance. As time goes on it is hoped that others will benefit out of the repayment of the past advances. The principal outlet for the Maori has been the dairying, and here the Department endeavours to make certain that only the best stock is secured for him, realizing that it costs just as much to feed and care for poor stock which gives much less satisfactory returns. This necessitated the establishment of "holding farms" where stock is cared for after purchase until required by the particular dairy-farmer. Stock is only entrusted to those found capable of properly caring for them. If a Maori shows want of diligence he has to make way for others who are only too anxious to prove that they can make good. The nature of the assistance or the character of the industry to be undertaken depends on the report of the Department's experts upon the land affected.

The Maoris of Hawke's Bay, in common with their European friends, suffered damage in the earthquake which took place in February last, while the Natives of the whole Dominion have felt the full effects of the economic crisis. Special funds were set up to tide them over their difficulties. All these are strained to the utmost and while there are still many individual cases of distress the relief granted has for the time being alleviated some of the distress. The way the Maori people have met the situation reflects credit on that race. They are not inclined by nature to be pessimistic, but are always buoyed with the hope of brighter days in store.

Three Maoris have been declared Europeans this year, making a total of seventy-six, or an average of four persons for each of the nineteen years since the statute was passed. The question arises whether the provision for Europeanization, which is averse to Native sentiment, and which is mostly resorted to for conveyancing reasons, should be retained. It has not been an unmixed blessing for those who have taken advantage of the provision.