

# It Could Happen Here!

By "UISDEAN."

CAN you picture the fertile province of Taranaki as a desert? Probably the majority of people would look upon that question as positively ridiculous, and maybe it is as applied to the immediate future. But, take a really long-term view, and such a possibility is not inconceivable. Old residents of the province assert that the climate has changed even in their lifetime, and they unhesitatingly ascribe it to deforestation.

Forty or fifty years ago, after a rainfall of any consequence, creeks and rivers ran fairly full for a period of up to two or three weeks. Now, a "fresh" disappears in as many days, and a stream which may be running a "banker" will resume what may be termed "normal" flow within twenty-four hours of rain ceasing.

So many changes have taken place in the Waingongoro River in the vicinity of Eltham within the past forty years or so, that it is difficult for people who knew it in those earlier days to recognise certain spots. What was a favourite swimming pool at that time, at the back of Taumata Park, is now dry land, and the river is confined to a narrow channel which is being cut deeper year by year. Above the park, where there is now a fifteen-foot bank, one could step into the water a foot or so below. In a corner below the dairy factory, where bathers used to dive off a ten-foot bank into deep water, there is now dry land, over which cattle graze. For miles up and down the river, the same changes have taken place, and one may well ask "where is it going to end?" It does not require a great effort of imagination to envisage the river confined for the most part in a deep gorge—not in the near future, and not in the lifetime of the present inhabitants of the province, but definitely at some date. The process of erosion is constant, inexorable, more perilous because it is insidious, and it will increase in speed as further bush disappears.

## EROSION'S TOLL.

If changes have taken place in the river-bed what of the mountain? Not so many years ago, tracks on the southern slopes which were only just discernible as such, have now been gouged out to a depth of several feet, and had to be abandoned in favour of new routes, on which

the same process is being repeated. In some cases, the track has been entirely washed away, and in others has been replaced by a gulch which is growing deeper year by year. That is cold, hard fact—it cannot be denied nor ignored.

In the name of sport, scrub was cleared from a slope above Dawson Falls—a ski run was provided, quite a good thing in itself, although its cost may ultimately be too high, for it has paved the way for erosion. Rainstorms are washing the scoria down into the scrub, which is retreating, slowly maybe, but none the less surely. And what is occurring there is going on all over the mountain wherever vegetation is destroyed, whether by human agency or four-footed pests. No one can state positively that this process will not become progressively greater in the course of years, but experience suggests that it will. One does not deserve the title of visionary for depicting water-courses formed through interference with nature, tearing gullies in the slopes and, along with the flow of scoria following the disappearance of vegetation, virtually destroying the beautiful forest which clothes the slopes of the mountain, and which is the province's most priceless asset. "That could not be for hundreds of years," say some. But why should it happen at all? Are our descendants to be deprived of what they are entitled to as their heritage? What would Taranaki be like without Egmont's forests? Scars are now plainly visible which were not there a comparatively short time ago. They will become bigger.

## FURTHER DESTRUCTION.

And now there is a proposal to widen the road through the bush to Dawson Falls hostel. Beautiful trees must be destroyed in the process, and what will be the eventual result? Wind storms will have greater scope for wreaking havoc, and the annual destruction through that agency, which is already bad enough, will be accelerated. There can be no excuse for proceeding with the work, having in mind examples from the past. To the credit of the Egmont National Park Board, they view the proposal with some concern, although they have made no definite protest against a work which