



farms

THANKS TO NEPTUNE



ON a warm, sunny morning in February, 1931, the business area of Napier, New Zealand, rocked in the throes of one of the most violent earthquakes in the Dominion's history. Whole blocks of buildings were laid low in a matter of a few seconds and great fires were started which completed the destruction. Hours later nothing was left of the town but an appalling heap of smouldering ruins.

Nature has her own way of compensating for her caprices. Sometimes the compensation is munificent, sometimes it is small. In this case she tossed into the laps of the people of Napier a wide tract of land not previously on the map—much after the manner of a mother who spanks her child and then hands it a jam tart to smooth its ruffled feelings. That was the area still known to Napier people by its original name of the Ahuriri Lagoon.

Before 1931 graceful, white-sailed yachts, launches, motor boats and gaily-painted canoes rode the placid waters of the lagoon, which stretched away westwards from the boundary of Napier to the Poraita hills beyond. Then came the earthquake, thrusting the town and its environs an average of seven feet higher than it had been before—and the shallow lagoon basin was left, literally speaking, high and dry. In the few convulsive seconds of

the upheaval an area of close on eight thousand acres had been added to the 'quake-torn face of the district.

Not that Nature completed the reclamation of the lagoon—that was to be done later, by the hand of man, when the possibilities of the new area impressed themselves on the Napier Harbour Board, to whom the unexpected legacy had fallen, and the Government, casting around for suitable unfertile lands to bring into profitable employment. Today crops sway in the sea breeze and sheep and cattle graze quietly on what fifteen years ago was ocean bed. Where pleasure craft once reigned supreme and weekend picnickers gathered in pleasant freedom from workaday cares, modern farming science has stepped in to develop and sweeten the soil of the former sea bed, and to lay out farm lands which seem likely—for highly satisfactory results have already been achieved—to prove the productivity of the area beyond question. Some day, possibly in a year or two, it will be broken up into farm holdings and offered to soldier settlers under rehabilitation plans, but that step will not be taken until the present developmental programme has been completed.