

on 16,000 rabbits were killed during the first three months of the present year, at a cost of 2d. a skin. On a third, the expense each week averages £27, and 50,000 rabbits have been killed since last year. On a fourth, we find nine men employed, with sixty dogs, killing at the rate of 2,000 per week. This enumeration might be almost indefinitely extended. It only remains to state that in some cases as much as 3d. a skin is paid, and even a horse and provisions are found; in others powder and shot, averaging 2d. per charge, are given in addition to 2d. per skin. It is to be remembered also that, in some instances, the dogs are fed on sharps, and occasionally on mutton (as feeding on rabbits is apt to give distemper), and, owing to the demand, have risen to high prices, varying from £5 to £15 each. It is generally considered that seventy to one hundred rabbits a day may be reckoned a fair average, supposing the man to be well supplied with ammunition and dogs, which in almost every case are provided by the runholder. So far as any return may be calculated on from the sale of skins, it may be said that the winter skins only are of any value, and that experiments connected with the sale have in this colony hitherto proved a failure. It is also to be borne in mind that, great as this expense is, a diminution in the number of rabbits will not very sensibly decrease it, because, though the men employed may be fewer, the wages of each, or the price per skin, would probably be increased, owing to the lesser number of rabbits that could be killed in a day.

*Injury to Quality of Wool.—Decrease in Quantity of Wool.*

In estimating the approximate loss to the sheepowner, there is also to be considered the decrease in the quantity of the wool. In Southland proper, there were from 700 to 800 bales less this year than the last, though the present was a favourable season. In one case, where 250 bales were shipped last year, there were only 150 this season; and, unless active remedial measures be adopted, it would be hard to say what the export would be next year. In another case, where there were 900 bales last year, there were only 750 this year. And not only do the rabbit ravages affect the quantity, but they injure also the quality of the wool; for as the young grass makes its appearance in the spring it is eagerly devoured by rabbits, and the ewes, with lambs following them, find themselves, when needing the most nourishment, reduced to comparative starvation.

*Decrease of Percentage of Lambs.*

The deficiency in the increase of lambs shows more clearly still the lessened depasturing capacity of the runs. For instance, one sheep farmer only got 900 lambs from 6,000 ewes, or 15 per cent.; another, 2,500 from 20,000 ewes, or 12½ per cent.; a third, 1,500 from 10,000 ewes, or 15 per cent.; a fourth, 700 from 10,000 ewes, or 7 per cent.; a fifth got no increase at all; while the average increase last year throughout the Western District—an exceptionally good year—was 20 per cent., instead of from 65 to 70.

*Decrease of Carrying Capacity.*

Equally expressive is the effect on the carrying capacity of the run, as regards stock. In one case, we learn that the flock was reduced from 9,000 to 6,500, or 27½ per cent.; in another, from 16,000 to 5,000, or 69 per cent.; in a third, from 40,000 to 25,000, or 37½ per cent.; in a fourth, there was a loss of 16,000 sheep in eighteen months; in a fifth, a loss of 7,532 in a flock of 43,310, or nearly 18 per cent.; and yet in another, two years ago there were shorn 22,000, last year 19,000 only, showing a decrease of 13½ per cent.; and this present year only 15,000 were shorn, showing a further decrease of 21 per cent., or, in two years, about 32 per cent. of actual diminution.

All this speaks of the past. It would be difficult to anticipate the future. The rapid increase of the scourge, notwithstanding the slaughter, will tell most powerfully on the old ewes and the young lambs: on the former from the absence of the young and succulent grasses, on the latter from deficient nutriment from their mothers. Thus old and young will both suffer, to say nothing of the want of stamina in the remainder of the flock.

*Decrease of Fattening Capacity.*

We have heard many and serious complaints of the deficiency of fattening capacity on the runs owing to the ravages of the rabbits. In one instance, where three years since 2,300 fat sheep and bullocks were got off a run carrying 16,000, now it barely carries 5,000, and among them scarcely one fit to be killed.

The rabbit is somewhat dainty in its selection of food. It chooses the English and finest native grasses, yet condescends to snatch a meal off the young tussock growth as it springs into existence. Not only does it devour, but it destroys herbage by its pollutions wherever it feeds, driving cattle and sheep away, and rendering the soil a desert. Nor does it confine its devastations to grass, the young trees in the forests being barked, and thereby seriously, if not permanently, injured. And further, we might state what we have ourselves experienced—namely, the danger of riding rapidly across country, and what we have observed in the honeycombing of the railway embankments to an extent which, if not arrested, threatens to be seriously injurious to the travelling public.

*Effect on State Revenue.*

We might well stop this enumeration were it right to do so, but there is yet another point from which this increasing evil must be viewed, and that is the effect on the provincial estate. In Southland proper, there being an acreage assessment, the effect is not much felt as far as the revenue is concerned; but, if the scourge is not arrested, what will be the value of the estate for leasing, say in 1881, when most of the leases fall in? We do not feel called upon to entertain this question, but it may not be unimportant to observe that in Otago as it existed before the union, where the rabbit nuisance is comparatively not so alarming, the results are nevertheless, it is said, not insignificant.

### III.—DIFFICULTIES IN EXTERMINATING THE RABBIT.

*Extraordinary Fecundity.*

The chief difficulty in exterminating the rabbit arises from their powers of multiplying. Blaine, in his Book of Rural Sports, observes that rabbits will breed at six months old, bear seven times annu-