

Select Committee of the Provincial Council of Otago informs us that the general character of the colony is hilly, wooded, and broken. Prior to 1869, the rabbit was known to exist there, but, as its natural enemies, tiger-cats, devils, eagle-hawks, and wild domestic cats, were numerous, the evil was insignificant: but, many of these vermin being destructive to lambs, they were destroyed in vast numbers; while in 1869 the wild domestic cat was seized with a fatal disease, and almost entirely extirpated. Since then, and in consequence of the diminution of their natural enemies, the rabbits appear to have taken full possession of several parts of the country, so much so as to necessitate action on the part of the Legislature.

Before submitting a concise sketch of this legislation, obligingly furnished by the Governor, it may be desirable to state that the Colonial Secretary, in a memorandum of the 28th March last, observes that "The operation of the laws in force for the destruction of rabbits has on the whole proved of great service in keeping under this serious scourge to the farmer; but it requires united action, and the cordial co-operation of all the infested localities, to secure practical results of a durable character."

"The Rabbits Destruction Act" became law at the close of 1871, and was to continue in operation until the end of the first session of 1874, and no longer. In September, 1874, it was slightly amended, and given a further currency to the 31st December, 1877, and, again, in September, 1875, additional powers were given as to altering and re-defining districts. As these three Acts and "The Cross and By-roads Act, 1870," are appended to this report, it will be sufficient to say that a Rabbit District may be proclaimed on the petition of not less than ten persons, being landowners under the Act, should not a counter-petition be presented by landowners in the same district having a greater number of votes. Powers are given for the election of Trustees, who are thereby enabled to impose a rate to the extent of 1s. in the pound in any one year of the annual value of the property in the district: the occupier of Crown land, under lease or license, paying only one-half of any rate. In case of a landholder neglecting or refusing to destroy the rabbits on his property, the trustees may enter upon such lands for the purposes of the Act, and further may enter to search for rabbits. Accompanying these Acts, and also appended hereto, is a statement by Mr. Latham, Council Clerk and Secretary to "The Hamilton Rabbit Trust." The Hamilton Rabbit District was constituted in April, 1872, and the landowners elected Trustees, who proceeded to levy a rate, and appointed one of their number in each section of their district to purchase skins. These skins were paid for by the Trustees monthly, after audit. In three years there was a sum of 9d. in the pound raised by rate; 347,860 rabbits were killed, and their skins sold; and the proceeds of the sale, together with the rates, left only a very few pounds to debit of the Trust. The skins must be perfectly dry when purchased, sprinkled with diluted carbolic acid on the fleshy side, to prevent the ravages of the weevil, which vermin reduces the value of the skin one-half, and then the skins should be carefully packed in bales and sold.

Mr. Latham further states that there are runs in Tasmania on which a good shot could bag from 300 to 400 daily six years ago, and now you could not meet six. He advocates the introduction of ferrets, obtainable at about 10s. a pair, which should be turned out wild; and feels confident that, knowing New Zealand as well as he does, he "could organize such a system as would exterminate the rabbits in a very few years."

Report of Chief Inspector of Sheep, Tasmania.

Scarcely agreeing with this statement is the report of the Chief Inspector of Sheep in Tasmania, dated 26th July, 1875. Mr. James Whyte, the gentleman referred to, says: "I regret to say that, from my own observation, while travelling through the country, I cannot state that any diminution of this plague has taken place generally. On the contrary I am disposed to believe that, although their numbers have been greatly diminished in some parts of the Oatlands and other midland districts, where a few years ago they were so numerous, yet, taking the country throughout, there are at the present moment more rabbits than at any former period. They are now to be seen in numbers where a few years ago scarcely a rabbit could be seen.

"I believe it is no exaggeration whatever to say that at this time rabbits are consuming food which would support 250,000 sheep, which, at a moderate calculation, is a direct annual loss to the colony of £62,500, without taking into account the money expended in merely keeping them down and mitigating the plague.

"Hitherto the heavy losses sustained from rabbits have been confined to a few localities, and it is only those who have suffered severely who are really fully sensible of the evil. The settlers, as a body, when there are few rabbits, are totally indifferent on the subject, and laugh at the idea of their runs being invaded.

"It is my belief they are fatally mistaken, and that, ere many years have passed, where rabbits are now scarcely seen, they will become as numerous and of course as destructive as ever they have been found to be by some of the unfortunate victims in Oatlands, Rcoss, Campbelltown, Green Ponds, Bothwell, and Hamilton.

"In 1874 rabbit skins to the number of 474,468, valued at £3,725, were exported, principally from Hobart Town."

From another reliable authority well acquainted with New Zealand, we learn that in Tasmania rabbits were tolerably well kept down where precautions were taken, that is, in proclaimed rabbit districts; but he confesses he looks with some apprehension as to the future of the large hilly tracts of New Zealand pastoral country, where the soil is loose and rocky.

New South Wales.

From a communication received from the Colonial Secretary of New South Wales it appears that the colony is not troubled with rabbits.

South Australia.

The Chief Secretary in South Australia transmits a copy of "The Rabbit Destruction Act, 1875,"* under which several districts have voluntarily brought themselves, and it is anticipated that the

* Filed in the Colonial Secretary's office.