

operation of the measure will be beneficial. This Act is appended to the report. Its main features generally follow the Tasmanian statute, the definition of a landholder being more restricted, and leased Crown lands being rated as other lands. The proclamation into a rabbit district differs from the Tasmanian statute, no counter petition availing in the South Australian Act.

VI.—SUGGESTIONS MADE TO COMMISSIONERS.

We have before stated that we lost no opportunity in our travels of ascertaining the feelings and views of those concerned in the object of our inquiries, and that, though our Commission does not authorize us to make any special recommendation, yet we should not be fulfilling the duties we have undertaken did we not submit the result of our conversations to your Honor.

Crown should share Expense. Extension of Leases, &c.

We have been particularly struck with one circumstance, and we commend the consideration of it to your Honor. The Crown tenants complain that, as the introduction of the rabbit was not an act of theirs, they should not be left unaided in its extermination. They urge that the Crown has a present as well as a continuing interest in the well-being of the pastoral country: that were they to cease their exertions and close their purses the assessment paid in the northern part of Otago would decrease materially, while in both parts the runs would, on completion of the leases, be a comparatively worthless or certainly a much depreciated possession, as would be shown when submitted for new or renewed leases. They further urge that, while the depasturing capacity is materially affected, they are called upon with diminished means to clear their runs of a nuisance at a time when their leases are about to expire. As a partial recompense for their exertions, and as a stimulus to rid the country of the pest, some point to a five years' extension of their leases; others to an annual subsidy, to repayment of the duty on dogs and powder; and others, again, to the introduction of a law which shall compel the owners or occupiers and lessees of all lands in infested districts to submit to a tax on the annual value of their property, to be raised and expended by local trustees, or by an inspector, as in the case of the existing Scab Act, under efficient Crown supervision. Stress has been laid on the necessity that this legislation, to be effective, should be compulsory not only on all in a proclaimed infested district, but on all portions of the country where rabbits are known to exist in greater or lesser numbers.

Subdivision into Smaller Runs.

Some of those with whom we have conversed have indicated, as the only effectual method of extirpation, when the leases run out, to subdivide the runs into smaller blocks, and thus people the country. To this it has been answered that the nature of the greater part of the unsold pastoral lands in Southland is not, as a general rule, adapted for such subdivision; that nearly the whole of the land in the plains and uplands commanding the hill country is already sold, and that the higher lands are only of value to those who possess the base. It has again been urged that if the present occupant of the pastoral country, with his accumulated means, employing a large number of men, cannot unaided surmount the difficulty, there would be but little hope for ten times the number of occupants of lesser means or smaller areas to cope with it, considering that, though the rental per acre might be the same, the latter would have extensively to fence their subdivisions to support themselves and families on land ill adapted for cropping, and to carry on continued warfare against the rabbits occupying the country.

Introduction of Natural Enemies.

The expediency of introducing a certain class of natural enemies of the rabbit has been urged on our attention, such as ferrets, stoats, and weasels—but not such as would injure lambs. The use of poisoned grain in winter has been practised, but is strongly objected to, as having a tendency, not only to poison dogs, perhaps sheep and horses, but hawks and such useful auxiliaries.

Establishment of Curing and Preserving Machinery.

The establishment of curing and preserving machinery has been suggested, but it has been stated, in opposition that such a system would not answer unless 5,000 rabbits a day could be procured, and the nature of the country and the distance to be traversed preclude the possibility of putting the cleaned rabbit in the hands of the curer within twenty-four hours after being caught—which is absolutely necessary—to say nothing of the operation being confined to the winter season, when the skin is most valuable, and the meat most likely to be suited for curing. Besides, if the average expense of killing, skinning, and preserving the skin is 4d. each, there is to be added the expense of curing and tinning, which would be about 3d. a pound additional.

Report of Select Committee of Provincial Council of Otago.

The Select Committee of the Provincial Council of Otago, in their report of June, 1875, remarking on "the serious damage done through the ravages of the rabbit," recommended that, "with the view to a limitation of the nuisance by repressive action, legislation should be had recourse to; that the machinery of Road Boards should be made available, or, where no such Boards exist, committees should be formed having compulsory rating powers; that Government should grant a bonus per skin; that the skins should be sold; that the rabbits' natural enemies should be introduced; and that gunpowder and shot should be exempt from duty.

Memorandum of Chief Sheep Inspector.

The Chief Sheep Inspector, in his memorandum of 6th April, 1876, expresses his opinion that "some compulsory steps in the shape of legislation should be taken;" otherwise he is certain that "a great portion of the Crown lands, now occupied as runs, and fit for no other purpose, will by the time the leases expire be considerably deteriorated in value, their carrying capacity being reduced; and country situated favourably for climate, and having cover for the pests, will be comparatively valueless."