

APPENDICES.

Copies of Letters, &c., relative to the Rabbit Nuisance.

No. 1.—From Mr. ROBERT F. CUTHBERTSON.

FIRST and above all, Government must undertake destruction on unoccupied Crown lands, or submit to see whole colony devastated. The area of unoccupied Crown lands in the West Oreti Rabbit District (Southland) is over one-half of whole area, and in Lake Wakatipu District three-sevenths of whole area. Destruction must be made universal, and compulsory on all alike where rabbits exist. On mountainous country it might be desirable to introduce stoats, weasels, and ermine from Great Britain, or probably California and British Columbia. As Chairman of West Oreti Trust, I sent Home some years ago, *carte blanche*, to get out £500 worth of vermin, but failed to get any at all. Would recommend sending to British Columbia; and to India for mongoose. Australian native cats are quite useless. The true specific for exterminating rabbits is inoculation with some deadly and infectious disease; but the danger is its being communicated to man, as well as other animals. However, mange might be tried, and inquiries instituted on this point. Leasing mountain country with stocking clause is useless; it has failed in Southland. Much country cannot carry a hoof in winter. When rabbiters take up a run for the purposes of their trade they only work on special portions, reserving others as breeding-grounds for next season, and thus propagate the pest. In farming districts, where holdings are small, one man may poison now; while his neighbours may not for months. This has been found to be a serious evil; and it has been proposed that in such districts where holdings are small, stated periods should be fixed, once or twice a year, during which it would be compulsory on every owner to poison his holding. I fear the suggestion would not be easily carried out. Stringent supervision is a much better remedy. In some farming districts there are now more rabbits than on the same area up-country, owing to the inaction among farmers. As many leases of runs in Otago and Southland expire in March, 1883, and are sold by auction in March, 1882, it follows that between these two dates, as well as for the year prior to the auction, the present owner will do little or nothing in the work of destruction, unless he be the successful competitor at the auction; and trustees, when themselves runholders, are not likely to enforce the Act during that period. I would recommend that out-going tenants be compelled to kill during last two years of their leases, receiving compensation from in-coming tenant for part of their outlay. Runs would, in that case, yield Government a far higher rental than at present, as bidders would know what state the country was likely to be in when they got possession. If a tenant kill during the year prior to auction, he is manifestly increasing the value of the run as against himself; and if he lose the run at auction, and is not obliged to kill during the last year of his tenancy, the new owner will become the possessor of a much depreciated property, while during these two years rabbits have been spreading over the surrounding district. The remedy is either to give present tenant compensation for part cost of killing during last two years of his tenancy, payable by in-coming tenant, or let him be made to clear his run to the satisfaction of Government within a given time, and, as compensation for so doing, let him have an extension of lease for so many years at a fair rental.

No. 2.—From Mr. G. F. BULLEN.

YOUR favour *re* rabbits, of the 9th instant, is duly to hand. I am glad to say the ferrets have done, and are still doing, a great work for us in checking the rabbits; and I do believe the ferrets will be the salvation of the country, for truly the rabbits will ruin the country—at least, the sheepfarmers—if they are not kept down. My firm belief is the rabbit-catchers do more harm than good: they kill everything that kills a rabbit. I believe the cat and woodhen are both very destructive to the enemy. We have always encouraged and turned out all the cats we can: the ferrets kill all the woodhens. We turned out ferrets about eight years ago, and have been turning out more or less every year, the last two or three years going in to breed and turn out about two hundred a year, which we shall continue as long as we see any rabbits around. The dark ferrets are the best. This country extends, you may say, from the Kahautara to the Conway. They will go where they please. It is considerably over 100,000 acres, and I believe there are many hundreds of ferrets on it; we leave it entirely to them to do the work, keeping one man to breed and act as keeper over the ferrets. He carries a gun, and kills a rabbit whenever he gets the chance; but, unfortunately, our neighbours allow men to catch rabbits on their country. These men catch the ferrets, and they pay them better; consequently our ferrets are being exported to all parts of the country. This, Sir, I consider is very cruel (after expending thousands to try and master the rabbits, our greatest enemies) to find any loafer can go on Government land adjoining yours and catch every ferret, and send them out of the district, and advertise them as your ferrets. Now, Sir, if you can use your influence to show the present Government the necessity of protecting us, by protecting the rabbits' enemies, you will do a great deal of good to yourself and yours truly,—G. F. BULLEN, Kaikoura. —21st June, 1881.

No. 3.—From Mr. LAWLOR.

I wish to lay emphasis on a matter of which you are quite aware. The rabbit pest has left homeless and desolate many families down here, and it is not difficult to predict that it shall do so by many more unless their ravages be stopped; and, as a first step, a clearly-framed Act. I have sufficient experience to say that the nuisance is one that can be abated, and this can I say, did I get the chance of clearing all that country south of Matura, I would, in three years from the time of setting to work, have the country restored to its normal carrying capacities, provided the Act would work. But with an Act that will not work the evil must remain, for the people themselves will never clear the rabbits. We all know the history of the scab and the Scab Act; and it is only by an equally strong hand that the rabbits can be driven out.—D. SHEA LAWLOR.—Invercargill, 20th June, 1881.

No. 4.—From Mr. A. DOUGLAS.

IN conformity with your request that I would give you a few jottings of my experience of the rabbit-nuisance question I beg to state as follows: About three and a half years ago, I was appointed Inspector of the West Oreti Rabbit District, which includes all that portion of the Wallace County north of the hundred line, and of the Southland County west of the Oreti River, comprising about 1,200,000 acres of occupied country, and about the same quantity of unoccupied Crown lands; a great portion of the latter, however, lies between Te Anau Lake and Bligh's Sound, and consists of densely-timbered country, or mountain tops with some narrow valleys. For the first two years an average of 150 men, with large packs of dogs and traps, were employed in the destruction of rabbits; but, though they could keep down the pest on the low-lying open country, the rabbits were constantly getting a firmer hold of the river-banks and timbered or rough broken country, and gradually working northward, in consequence of which the Hon. Robert Campbell threw up over 200,000 acres of hill country. Early in the year 1880 phosphorus was used, more or less, by several parties in the district; but the winter was half over before phosphorus could be obtained in large quantities and at a reasonable cost (the Trustees then getting a shipment direct), and the best of the season was past before any great extent of country was poisoned. I have, however, no hesitation in stating that where the grain was properly mixed, and laid out systematically hardly a rabbit was left alive, and at the present time, seven months having elapsed since the poisoned grain was laid, the decrease in number of rabbits and corresponding improvement in feed is very marked: the Merrivale Gorge and Cuthbertson's Plain, on the Waiatu River, being a good sample. Before phosphorus was used there, notwithstanding great expense and trouble was incurred with dogs, guns, traps, and ferrets, no permanent impression was made, and towards evening rabbits could always be seen in hundreds, but now there is fine feed, and very few rabbits. The Trustees are keeping up a regular supply of phosphorus for the use of the ratepayers; and at present about 120 men are engaged laying it out. Next month there will be several extra hands employed, and I have no doubt that the pest can be reduced to a minimum by united action. The large bush reserves and unoccupied country are, however, a great difficulty: Mr. Thomas, of Mararoa Station (manager for Mr. Campbell) has constantly employed from twenty-five to thirty men poisoning in winter, and using dogs, &c., in summer; but, as soon as the grass gets a little clean, fresh swarms of rabbits come in from the Takitimos on the south side, and the bush and hill country on the north side. Bush land is the hardest to deal with, as it requires frequent doses of poisoned grain round the edges, and but few skins are obtained, as the rabbits die inside, and cannot be found. In the case of high