

In order that the Act may be properly administered, it is imperative that the appointments of officers to carry out the law should be made with greater care than in the past, and none but efficient men allowed to remain in the service. Moreover, until scab is eradicated, it is not desirable that Inspectors in infected districts should be employed in any other capacity than that of Inspectors under the Sheep and Rabbit Acts. The Committee has also come to the conclusion that there is no hope of complete eradication of scab unless the Government at once take steps to remove from their employment those officers who, by the results of the past, have proved themselves incapable of stamping-out the scab in the district to which they have been appointed, and, further, that no officer who fails to clean the sheep under his charge within a period of two years should be retained in the service.

At the same time, the Committee would point out that remissions of fines inflicted upon convictions for breaches of the Act have been granted, in opposition to the intention of the Legislature and the meaning of the Act—the evident purport of which is that the imposition and payment of penalties should be imperative—and that these remissions have not, so far as can be ascertained, led to greater efforts on the part of the offenders to clean their sheep, but, on the contrary, have decidedly discouraged the officers in their attempts to perform their duty.

The Committee thinks that encouragement and support should be given to all officers whilst acting with diligence and good judgment in carrying out their instructions; and, with a view to affording all proper facilities for the eradication of scab, recommends that every assistance be rendered to the Inspectors for the purpose of clearing wild sheep from unoccupied Crown lands in infected districts.

Before leaving this part of the inquiry, the Committee would draw attention to one instance of serious loss to the colony at large (probably not generally known) which results from the existence of scab amongst our flocks. At the present time, and with a prospect of long continuance, there is a great demand for sheep in Australian markets, at prices which would yield large profits upon export from New Zealand. In consequence, however, of the quarantine regulations, New Zealand sheep are virtually excluded from Australia. Were this the only serious result of the existence of scab in the colony, it would yet fully justify the most earnest appeal to Government to use every effort to eradicate it in as speedy a manner as possible.

It will also be apparent on reference to the annual sheep returns (H.—3., 1884, p. 2), that, whilst the sheep rate in the Districts of Napier, Canterbury, and Otago, where there is no scab, exceeds the salaries paid to Inspectors by an aggregate sum of £4,029, the rate from the remaining districts, which are infected districts, falls short of the required amount by £3,010; and that, as the total sheep rate exceeds by £1,019 the total amount paid in salaries, it follows that the clean districts are contributing no less than £3,010 towards the expense of eradicating scab in the other districts, besides £1,019 towards the general revenue of the colony.

Lastly, the attention of the Committee has been drawn to the prevalence of lice amongst the flocks in several parts of the colony, and to the absence of authority under the 68th section of the Act for Inspectors to compel owners to dip their sheep, unless such sheep shall have been previously declared infected within the meaning of the Act.

This course involves more serious consequences than the evil to be remedied requires, and the Committee therefore thinks it desirable that an Act should be passed at once giving Inspectors the necessary powers to compel the dipping of sheep infected with lice, and to prevent them whilst thus infected from being travelled on roads or off the property of the owner. With this object in view, it recommends that a Bill to effect this purpose be introduced by Government without delay.

#### “THE RABBIT NUISANCE ACT, 1882.”

This Act will only continue in operation until the 1st October, 1885, and Parliament next session will no doubt be called upon to reconsider it with a view to its re-enactment.

It is gratifying to find that the evidence taken by the Committee substantially indorses the Superintending Inspector's report for the past year, that a substantial reduction in the number of rabbits has been effected in the districts and localities where they at one time threatened to completely extinguish the farming and sheep-growing industries, and that the steps taken to prevent their spread towards the hitherto uninfested districts of the colony have been attended with a considerable amount of success.

On the other hand, however, the evidence unmistakably proves that, notwithstanding the ample powers provided by the Act, which has now been nearly two years in operation, and the overwhelming proof from the Kaikouras and other districts that poisoned grain, followed up by the introduction of the ferret, has practically placed the solution of the rabbit difficulty within our reach, the colony is still suffering great annual loss from the immense numbers of rabbits which yet continue to infest the whole of the southern portion of the Middle Island, as well as large areas in the Nelson, Marlborough, and Wairarapa Districts.

The Committee are under no difficulty in deciding upon the principal causes which, so far, have prevented the pest from being reduced to a minimum.

Prominent amongst them are the large tracts of unoccupied Crown lands and reserves in the rougher portions of the Middle Island, which afford breeding-grounds for the pest, and whence the more valuable adjoining country is again and again stocked afresh. The Committee cannot too strongly urge upon the Government the necessity of taking immediate steps to provide for the occupation of these lands on such terms as would insure the destruction of the rabbits thereon, and thus free the colony from the heavy and ever-recurring annual outlay involved in rabbit destruction by contract. Until some such plan is adopted it seems hopeless to expect any great diminution of the pest, or any reduction of the expense which the owners of adjoining lands are most unfairly and unjustly compelled to incur in self-defence.

The Committee, however, is strongly of opinion that the most frequent cause of failure to destroy rabbits, and consequent public dissatisfaction, is the evident unfitness of many of the officers