

*“Commercial Importance of the Alaska Rookeries.*—To recapitulate. With the exception of these islands of Bering Sea, there are none elsewhere in the world of the slightest importance to-day. The vast breeding-grounds bordering on the Antarctic have been, by the united efforts of all nationalities—misguided, short-sighted, and greedy of gain—entirely depopulated. Only a few thousand unhappy stragglers are now to be seen throughout all that southern area, where millions once were found, and a small rookery, protected and fostered by the Government of a South American State, north and south of the mouth of the Rio de la Plata. When, therefore, we note the eagerness with which our civilization calls for sealskin fur, the fact that, in spite of fashion and its caprices, this fur is and always will be an article of intrinsic value and in demand, the thought at once occurs that the Government is exceedingly fortunate in having this great amphibious stockyard far up and away in the quiet seclusion of Bering Sea, from which it shall draw an everlasting revenue, and on which its wise regulations and its firm hand can continue the seals for ever” (p. 8, *“The Seal Islands of Alaska,”* by Henry W. Elliott. Washington, 1882).

*“Destruction of the Fur Seals for their Peltries.*—Vancouver, at about this date (1800), reported the existence of large numbers of fur seals on the south-west coast of New Holland. Attention was at once turned to this new field, and in 1804 the brig ‘Union,’ of New York, Captain Isaac Pendleton, visited this part of the Australian coast, but not finding these animals there in satisfactory numbers, repaired to Border’s Island, where he secured only part of a cargo (14,000 skins), owing to the lateness of the season. Later, 60,000 were obtained at Antipodes Island. About 1806 the American ship ‘Catharine,’ of New York (Captain H. Fanning), visited the Crozette Islands, where they landed, and found vast numbers of fur seals, but obtained their cargo from Prince Edward’s Island, situated a few hundred miles south-east of the Cape of Good Hope, where other vessels, the same year, obtained full cargoes. . . . So indiscriminate was the slaughter (at the South Shetland Islands) that whenever a seal reached the beach, of whatever denomination, it was immediately killed. Mr. Scott states, on the authority of Mr. Morris, an experienced sealer, that a like indiscriminate killing was carried on at Antipodes Island, off the Coast of New South Wales, from which island alone not less than 400,000 skins were obtained during the years 1814 and 1815. A single ship is said to have taken home 100,000, in bulk, which, through lack of care in curing, spoiled on the way, and on the arrival of the ship in London the skins were dug out of the hold and sold as manure!” (pp. 229 and 230, *“History of North American Pinnipeds;”* by Joel Asaph Allen. Washington, 1880).

When it is known that the revenue obtained from the seal fisheries of Alaska for 1881 was \$317,395 (say, £79,448), the value of these fisheries is apparent. I therefore submit whether it would not be desirable to protect the seal fisheries of this colony and keep them closed until such time as the fur seals have again become numerous, and then lease them under most stringent conditions as to number, age, and sex of those to be killed. It is quite possible that in the course of not many years a very considerable revenue might be obtained from this source.

*Harbour Improvement Plans.*—Only one Harbour Board—namely, Timaru—has forwarded a plan for publication this year. It is appended hereto.

*Returns.*—The usual report by the Marine Engineer on works carried out, Inspectors of Machinery’s annual returns, and wreck chart are attached hereto, as is also a lighthouse-chart, showing the coastal and principal harbour lights in the colony.

I have, &c.,

LEWIS H. B. WILSON,  
For Secretary.

The Hon. W. J. M. Larnach, C.M.G.,  
Minister having charge of the Marine Department, &c.