

“(2.) That the rabbit-pest has made the continuance of the system of annual leases of Crown lands impossible.”

Before proceeding further with the consideration of subclauses of clause 47 it was decided to hear a paper read on “Successful Rabbit-suppression,” prepared by Mr. Coleman Phillips, as follows:—

SUCCESSFUL RABBIT-SUPPRESSION.

I thought in attending this Conference merely to have placed my views before you, but, as you wish them written, I have much pleasure in doing so. I have now written so many papers upon this subject that I would ask you to excuse any repetition in the present one. I am glad to inform you that the rabbits in South Wairarapa (New Zealand) are still conquered, but that they require watching. Of course, they will always require watching, as it would be a mistake to try and exterminate them. Trying to exterminate rabbits will only increase their numbers. The evidence I gave before the Royal Commission in Sydney in 1888, I am most happy to say, still stands good.

I think now it will be generally admitted that some other remedy than that of rabbit-netting is required. The netting has been tried, but it has not succeeded in conquering the pest as we did in South Wairarapa in 1884–86—over a million acres without its aid. The rabbit has greatly spread in Australia since the netting remedy was adopted. I would ask the members of the Conference to permit me to take them over a little wider field than Australasia in viewing this question.

In Africa there is no rabbit-pest; yet Africa is the oldest continent, geologically and ethnologically. It is the original home of the rabbit and ferret, so far as we can gather. In India, China, and, I may say, the whole of Asia, there is no rabbit-pest; but Asia has always been connected with Africa by a narrow isthmus, so that the measures nature adopted to keep the rabbits down in Africa had a fair road to follow into Asia. The natural enemy followed upon the track of the rabbit, and kept an equal balance of prey upon prey. Had Australia only been connected with south-eastern Asia by a similar isthmus we should have had the rabbit, but not the rabbit-pest. Wallace well explains the reasons of the difference in both flora and fauna owing to this separation. In South America there is no rabbit-pest, and so very few rabbits are to be found there that the hospital authorities of Rio Janeiro lately sent here for a few hundred rabbits for experimental purposes. In North America there are occasional rabbit-pests, but the Indians always say that every seven years a disease arises and sweeps them off. This is the bladder-worm disease to which reference will be made later on. I would refer the Conference to Sir James Hector's correspondence with the Chief Inspectors of Stock in Canada upon this point. In none of these countries did nature use rabbit-netting as a means of suppression. And yet that is what Australia has been relying upon. In Europe—notably, France, Russia, Belgium, and England—they have occasional slight pests, but this is caused, I think, by people preserving the rabbit for a food-supply, as our rabbit-factories are now doing in these colonies. England kills about thirty million rabbits a year, and I think rabbits are even more plentiful in France and Belgium.

A thousand years before Christ the inhabitants of Phœnicia traded down to Spain (Tarshish) for ferrets, then called Tarshish cats. The Biblical people evidently saw the great beauty and utility of tame ferrets and nets. We are almost bound, strange to say, to fall back upon this original mode of suppression. Many verses in the Bible refer to the coney or rabbit, but whether the coney is our present rabbit there is some little doubt.

In the year 1 A.D. the inhabitants of the Balearic Isles petitioned the Roman Emperor to suppress a rabbit-pest, and two legions of the Roman army were sent to put it down. Previous to that time Aristotle relates that burning sulphur on hot coals at the mouths of burrows was tried, but it did not succeed very well. I think the same verdict will ultimately be given against the present use of bisulphide of carbon.

After the Cape of Good Hope had been discovered by the Portuguese, Prince Henry, of Portugal, sent some rabbits and other animals to the isles lying off the western African coast, and, naturally enough, one or two of the islands soon swarmed with rabbits. These held possession for almost centuries, proving that in-and-in breeding does not cause diminution. There are still a few of these rabbits left—a bluey rabbit.

Australia, New Zealand, and Tasmania are only other instances of insular lands becoming the prey of the rabbit when the natural enemy was not introduced with it to keep it in check.

Wild animals—the fox, wolf, lynx, cat, dog, stoat, weasel, &c.—feed upon the rabbit. When very thick, as in North America, where quite lately—that is, within the last three or four years—the rabbit was crossing the frozen Snake River into Oregon in millions, these animals collect, and feed solely upon the one food. Bladder-worm disease ensues, the grass becomes infected, anthrax sets in, and the dead bodies of the rabbits lie thick upon the land. The dingo, fox, snake, wild cat, ferret, stoat, and weasel should be made similar use of in Australia; I think also the kit-fox, for since the kit-fox has been killed off near San Francisco there the rabbit has sprung up again. The tape-worm of the wolf I believe to be the most deadly in its effect, but population always sweeps off this animal, and then a rabbit difficulty crops up. I used in the Wairarapa the bladder-worm from the dog, a much milder form of disease, in which I do not think anthrax supervenes. Liver-rot may, as *Cysticercus pisiformis* is attached to the liver, whereas *Cœnurus serialis* only affects the muscles.

I think M. Pasteur and I, out of the 1,600 applicants for the award, were, after all, upon the right track, although I would point out to M. Pasteur's representative in Sydney that he wished to spread artificially what I desire to spread naturally—that nature never spreads any disease artificially, but always naturally, by means of a host. The grass itself was and still is made use of (the more luxuriant the better) to sweep off the one set of animals which persist in feeding upon it. I can assure the Conference that grass has a wonderful power of protecting itself. It will kill off not only rabbits, but sheep, cattle, horses—anything, indeed, that fails to give it a fair spell. All we have to do is to infect it naturally, not artificially. I think the dingo will