

ANIMALS IN OUR FORESTS.

BY CAPTAIN E. V. SANDERSON.

A greater menace to New Zealand than any German or Russian menace is that of the presence of plant-eating animals in our forests, because in the event of our being overcome by a human enemy we should in all probability be allowed to sustain ourselves, otherwise we could not work for our conquerors, whereas in the event of the loss of our forests we cannot sustain ourselves. Here in New Zealand we are faced with a forest problem unknown in any other country, for during countless ages no plant-eating animals roamed in our forests. A forest has therefore been evolved which cannot withstand the attacks of deer, goats, opossums, and the like. Yet such animals have been purposely liberated and even now their presence is connived at by the Department which controls such matters and by others who are evidently prepared to sacrifice their country's welfare for the sake of sport or in other cases personal pecuniary gain. Even in warrants just issued by the Internal Affairs Department restriction is put on the number of stags which may be shot, and a season is defined in which deer may be killed. Surely, then, we must consider our forests doomed.

Were our forests of no commercial gain or æsthetic value this would not greatly matter. But they represent vast present and potential wealth. First of all they supply us with the all-essential timber. Then they prevent that devastating rush of water which washes away the thin soil covering off those of our hills which are forest clad and in its course towards the sea scours away huge slices from our best land and covers other such good land with stony debris.

Further, forests conserve moisture, give it off during periods of dryness and regulate the water supply in rivers, thereby preventing such disasters as the recent Mississippi catastrophe and lesser calamities which already happen in this country from time to time, resulting in loss to the individual and thereby to the community. In short, the importance of our forests to our great farming community and our city dwellers cannot be over-estimated. If, however, the ever-increasing number of plant-eating animals is permitted our priceless forests are doomed. Yet we permit these animals to be preserved in them for sport and other objects.

Now were it possible to replace these forests by replanting it would cost huge sums amounting to many millions of pounds and it would moreover be an exceedingly slow process. All this has