

NEW ZEALAND'S BIRDS.

At a time immeasurably remote—somewhere about the close of the Secondary era—New Zealand formed the south-western extension of a great continent stretching north to Fiji and New Guinea. In that far-distant period the portion which was to survive as New Zealand when all the remaining links sank beneath the surface of the ocean was colonized by most of its land-birds—or, rather, by most of the ancestors of the birds which were later to constitute the most extraordinary avine population on the face of the globe. The connecting-links sank—and through all the æons of the Tertiary era to, comparatively speaking, the present day New Zealand was cut off from the rest of the world.

At the time when New Zealand was last connected with larger land-masses mammals had either not yet been evolved from the common reptile-like stock from which our present lizards and snakes and the birds themselves have arisen, or else they had not yet reached a land by means of which they could spread to this country. The birds, then, were the highest evolved inhabitants of this isolated land. It was a heavily wooded country. The birds and the forest grew in beauty side by side: with their indissoluble interdependence, the importance of which has never hitherto been adequately realized. Thus this ancient New Zealand was above all else a land of birds; no other land-mass so large has remained isolated so long, and in no other area of any considerable size have birds achieved terrestrial domination. Such an unusual state of affairs was certain to produce extraordinary results.—*Dr. J. G. Myers and E. Atkinson, in N.Z. Journal of Agriculture.*



The Initial Steps towards Desert Formation caused by Over-grazing high Country.

[Photo by U.S. State Forest Service.]