

steep country and the replacing of the natural covering where it has been ignorantly destroyed.

Unless, however, New Zealanders as a nation can fully realise the gravity of the situation and thereby be impelled to insist on remedial measures, disaster is certain. The solution of the problems arising out of much past maladministration of our natural resources calls for very large expenditure and a wide-visioned public opinion, which can see the necessity of strong action and stand by those who have the courage to put national welfare ahead of sectional interests.

Is the task too big for New Zealanders?

ITALY NOT SO BAD.

OWL HATRED AND PUKEKO MURDER.

Aviculture (regard for birds) is one of the signs of human culture. A few years ago Italy was well behind, but her cultural advance in the field of bird-protection has been astonishing. It is doubtful whether New Zealand's progress, in the same period, has been equal.

The Italian has had the reputation of being cruel to birds and animals. Perhaps he was. Probably he found some excuse in an ignorance and superstition that have never had any parallel in New Zealand. Superstition, as much as cruelty, impelled Italians to nail owls to the doors of dwellings as "a protection against the evil eye." But in recent years a law has been passed protecting all nocturnal birds of prey that are useful to Italian agriculture. This protection includes all the owls, migratory or stationary, except one species. Owl-protection against "the evil eye" now costs an Italian peasant a fine of about 1,000 lire.

But in New Zealand we still shoot pukekos. We do not pretend that this protects us against evil eyes. We do pretend that it is sporting. And this latter pretence is more grotesque and revolting than anything that can be found in Italian superstition.

If an artist could present the shooting of confiding pukekos in its true natural colours he would surely kill this "sport" for all time. Pukeko-shooting implies not ignorance and superstition but a lack of the sense of the ridiculous.

Faced with a popular benightedness that caused many Italians to believe the owls' dark haunts to be the region of devils, the Italian Government administered a series of legislative

shocks to this frame of mind, by passing protective laws (fauna and flora) that (according to the Natural Fascist Organisation for the Protection of Animals) compare with any in the world. From a pamphlet of the Organisation we quote:—

"With regard to migratory birds, for which our Peninsula serves as a landing and resting place, the Duce himself has made provision for a safe refuge for them in the Island of Capri, where, according to a Decree issued in 1934, a zone of refuge was established. A word from a poet was enough to move the generous soul of Mussolini. Axel Munthe, a Swedish doctor, while in the Island of Capri, wrote his 'San Michele,' which achieved an astonishing success throughout the whole world. The appeal made by the writer to the Duce for the birds in the island met with an immediate approval and response. Capri has become a place sacred to wild birds and hunting of all descriptions is forbidden."

Some time ago "Forest and Bird" quoted an English author who deplored that bird-nesting is a national pastime among British youth, more so than among the youth of the "cruel" Continent of Europe. In New Zealand also bird-nesting by boys is too much encouraged or condoned. Compare this blemish with a pamphlet issued by a section of the Association of Hunters of Sieva, which "makes an earnest appeal to all schoolmasters to whom is entrusted the education of children. It is necessary that the deplorable habit of bird-nesting should be stopped by close supervision, as, in addition to being an offence against the humanitarian sen-