

MAINLY ABOUT RABBITS

By "SUNDOWNER"

EVERYONE who travels through Otago and Southland expects to see rabbits. He expects to see them dead on the roads, dead on the fences, and so much alive over the fences that the hillsides seem to have a pulse. That is the expectation and the still popular belief, and there was a time when it bore some relation to the facts.

To-day it is just a legend. In a drive of 250 miles through Central and West

MAINLY ABOUT RABBITS

Lowburn, about as the Manuherikia, and little scampers, of twos and threes for about a mile on either side of Raes Junction.

In Southland the situation was a little different. I saw rabbits wherever I saw gorse hedges—especially the old-style hedge with a sod-wall foundation—but three out of four were only a quarter or half grown, and a surprising number were babies sitting quite still at the mouths of burrows. I know that these babies will themselves have babies before winter if they live, and I know that rabbits are not very active in the middle of the day when I did most of my travelling. But I am not blind to the other signs of occupation, and don't have to see rabbits to know when I am in their country. No one does if rabbits for many years were his only currency—if a pocket-knife meant ten skins, a new tie twenty, a rifle or a visit to town two or three hundred.

I am as little likely to miss the signs of rabbits to-day as I am to forget the jingles every rabbit, musterer, shearer, and shed-hand specialised in 50 years ago:

Of rabbits young and rabbits old,
Of rabbits timid and rabbits bold,
Of rabbits tender and rabbits tough,
O thank the Lord we've had enough.

I DID however meet a man who told me that he had caught 2,000 rabbits last winter on one small block, and another whose tally was 2,500. I was assured that £2000 was not an impossible return for a man with a good block, and was

RABBITS ARE POLITICAL

supplied with details to prove that one run-holder had made £10,000, less the cost of poison, and the wages and rations of 16 men for eight months at £1 each a day.

But I soon found that rabbit stories were like all hunting stories in this respect—that they varied according to

the weather, the mood, and the imagination of the teller; and unlike them in this other respect—that they were 50 per cent. political. Whatever is the case in other parts of the Dominion rabbits in Otago and Southland are party politics. If you farm in a Rabbit Board area, rabbits will prevent your right hand from knowing what your left hand is doing. If you are in a free area they will keep you awake at nights wondering what your rates will be when your holding is gathered in too. And whether your representative in Parliament is as wise as a serpent or as harmless as a dove he will not escape accusations that he has told one story in Wellington and another over your fence. But if you are so foolish yourself as to seek election to your Board, you will become a rabbit-farmer, or a netting manipulator, or a trafficker in carrots, or a wink-and-nod man for some purpose other than the speedy and complete destruction of every buck, doe, runner, and sucker above or below ground in your territory.

So at least I gathered by talking first to a free-area farmer, then to a Board-area farmer, then to a rabbit, then to a farmer-rabbit, then to a Board member, then to a Board employee. It is true that farmers' troubles are seldom so bad as they sound, but after a few days discussing rabbits from all these different angles, I found myself wondering what had so greatly reduced the rabbit population already, and whether it is my luck to return to Otago ten years hence I shall see any rabbits at all out of the museum.

* * *

I SOMEHOW missed it in the newspapers, but was told in Clyde that Parliament had approved of changes in the Rabbit Act that will make rabbits "as rare as that bird they've just discovered in Southland."

"Re-discovered," I said.

"Yes, that's right; found again. The first for 50 years. Well that's how rabbits will be."

"And what will happen then?"

"The farmers who are crying out now will be down on their knees thanking God. They'll be running ten sheep for every six or seven they run now, and if they stop their burning this country will be what it was when the first settlers saw it."

"Do you think the tussocks will come back?"

(continued on next page)

REDUCED PRICES

BLUE Gillette BLADES

NOW

5 for 1'6 10 for 3'.

For Girls . . . A BANKING VOCATION

Little more than a quarter of a century ago a banking vocation was the sole prerogative of men, but to-day the banking profession is open to women, who are playing an increasingly important role in the provision of the various services which the banks perform for the business and farming community and general public.

The NATIONAL Bank of New Zealand, Limited, with its 104 branches and agencies throughout New Zealand, has positions available for girls who are completing their secondary education this year. The personal nature of banking work ensures its interest, and the experience gained of commercial methods affords a useful business training with good opportunities for advancement.

The commencing salary is £150 p.a., £165 p.a. for girls with School Certificate. The remuneration reaches a minimum of £330 p.a., and thereafter salary increases are granted on merit, and depend on the nature and responsibilities of the duties performed.

Girls who are considering a banking vocation should apply for further particulars to the Manager of any of the branches of The NATIONAL Bank of New Zealand, Limited, in the main cities and provincial towns, or to the Staff Officer, The National Bank of New Zealand, Limited, General Manager's Office, G.P.O. Box 1508, Wellington.