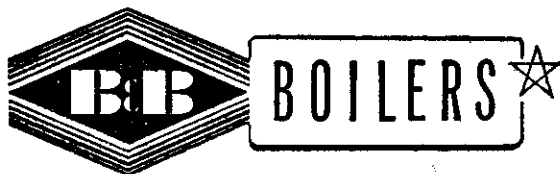




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(continued from previous page)

"On the flats—yes. Perhaps not on the rocky faces. But it will be clover and English grasses then, with irrigation in a big way."

"You're optimistic about the killing?"
"Absolutely. This killer policy will root them right out."

"Why aren't the farmers rushing it?"
"Because rabbits mean free cash to them. Their wool goes through the firms, but the rabbits are their own."

"But if they had no rabbits they would not be afraid of the firms. They would have far more sheep."

"Half as many again. But that doesn't buy a new car or a new radio this year. They will of course come to it."

"You think they will?"

"They will have to under the new Act. But in a year or two they'll be wondering why they ever resisted it."

"Do many resist?"

"Most farmers resist what is new. If they don't resist it they don't support it. But they're not fools; and when they have had time to think about it they are for it if it is for them."

"What about the rabbit-baiters?"

"Their day is done—except as wage-earners for the Boards. I'm sorry for them, because their big money has never been easy money. But the country can't afford rabbits, and therefore it can't afford rabbit-baiters or rabbit dealers."

"There is the existing population of rabbits to dispose of."

"Not by individuals or firms. The essential point of the new policy is that rabbits will be valueless. It must never again be worth while to let a single rabbit live."

* * *

It all sounded convincing to me till I discussed it with a sheep-farmer who had killed his rabbits years ago and wanted to know why he should now be taxed for neighbours who had neglected theirs.

"The Boards have power to put a crippling rate on land—all land—though one man's land may be clear and another's badly infested. But the man who farms his rabbits is an outlaw among his neighbours. They know who he is, and there would be no difficulty in dealing with him. Rating everybody is like levying a tax on a district every time someone commits theft. Let them catch the thief and collect from him."

"You think rabbit farmers are not very numerous?"

"I'm sure they're not. Farmers hate rabbits. They hate them all the year round. They're as likely to farm them as bee-farmers are to cultivate foul-brood and fruit-farmers to breed codlin moths. Rabbits are vermin to us, and don't forget that they do more than eat grass."

"I've seen what they can do to young crops."

"I was thinking of trees. Every farmer should plant more trees, and most would if there were no rabbits. But rabbits mean netting fences, so the trees never go in."

"But you'll now be able to put them in. When the Boards have killed the rabbits the fencing will not be necessary."

"I'll believe that when I see it. What I've seen so far leaves me with some doubts."

"Have you seen the bull-dozers at work on the warrens?"

"I've heard that bull-dozers have been used on sandy flats; also rotary hoes."



"THE man who farms his rabbits is an outlaw among his neighbours"

But how far would they get in these gullies?"

"I asked them that question in Central Otago, and the answer was that guns, ferrets, dogs, and cyanide gas would do the job where bull-dozers couldn't be used."

"That may have been their answer. What I want to see is the dead rabbits."

"I'm told that you don't see them after the bull-dozers and rotary hoes—that they're smothered in the warrens and stay there."

"How old are you?"

"Nearly as old as you, I should think."

"Don't you think we're both old enough not to be bull-dozered ourselves by propaganda? I've seen rabbits come and I've seen them go. They almost disappeared in this district between 1900 and 1910. No one knew why. Now we have to subsidise the districts they like better."

A Matter of Fact

"MY creed as a scientific worker rests on an almost religious conviction about the goodness of measured facts; that all facts are good; they may be facts about bad things, but if they are facts they're good and valuable. I believe that the measured facts of basic science, the observed relations among them, and the tentative theories based on these relations, should be published for everyone to know."—Sir Robert Watson-Watt in a BBC talk.