

Register July 10th 1886.

THE RABBIT QUESTION.

TO THE EDITOR.

Sir—I beg to urge the Parliament to take efficient steps for preventing the introduction of harmful animals, such as ferrets and weasels, and also of contagious diseases among animals, unless Parliament first sees fit to sanction the introduction of either. It has always seemed to me that far the worst of the rabbit plague was the train of evils it was likely to entail from blind and useless efforts to cure it. In New Zealand, where no snakes exist, some members of the squatterocracy wished to introduce them as an antidote to the rabbit, and there is a great probability that the snake found lately at Auckland was nefariously imported with this object. The recklessness with which some men run the risk of saddling the country with untold evils is also shown by the fact that foxes were once purposely let loose in Victoria to breed. Perhaps you, Sir, would kindly inform us what law there is on the subject here so far as mongoose, &c., and the diseases threatened against the rabbits are concerned. If there be a law it wants attention. Less than animals, perhaps, should any man be allowed of his own motion to inflict a contagious disease on the community. A stringent law on this subject would, I feel confident, pave the way to the utter discomfiture of our enemy, the poor little bunny. Deadly diseases and torments being familiarly spoken of in this connection, the public naturally begin to range themselves against this method of dealing with the question. But if it were known that all danger from this source were at an end they would call out for an inexpensive death to the rabbit. It would be easy to ensure safety in this respect, even though it should be judged right to use the sarcoptes cuniculi of Professor Watson. An honest man or a Commission could be sent home to Europe to ascertain by adequate enquiry whether the disease attacked other animals than the rabbit, and if so whether sufficient precautions could be taken to prevent danger. If cattle and other animals are not likely to be attacked by the disease at home, where the thing must have existed a long time, it may fairly be presumed that they will not be endangered here. Professor Watson, I take it, is a man who, from his position, is likely to weigh his words, and he had good reason to believe that a colony of rabbits had been eradicated by the disease already in this country, and yet no harm was done to other animals. At the very least it would be worth while to make enquiries on the subject. These could be made by telegraph, by letter, or by sending a reliable messenger, and the subject is much more than sufficiently important to warrant all these steps being taken, especially when the neighbouring colonies could be asked to share in the expense. The present system is simply pouring water into the proverbial sieve. Sixteen thousand pounds odd have been spent on rabbit parties already during the season the rabbits have not been breeding, when they were already three-parts destroyed, and when the season has been sufficient of

itself to keep them low from starvation. We are told it was only £16,000. What will it be as the number of rabbit parties increase? Presently we shall be trying the result system again, and then go over the whole of the exploded methods once more; and yet the rabbits will gain headway unless some natural cause should check them. Far better to save the public money, and not unteach the colonists the lesson of self-help and independence. Far better this, even though nothing at all were done against the vermin. The Government have no right pretending to do private persons' work for them. But a matter of vital importance, such as the introduction or prohibition of a contagious disease, is just what the Government should take in hand. Before leaving the subject perhaps I may inform Mr. A. F. Lindsay, who did me the honour of referring to a former letter of mine, that the New Zealand Government used to put, and no doubt still puts, a bonus on the export of rabbit-skins as a means of encouraging their destruction. This accounts for Mr. Lindsay finding that the skins were worth 2s. 4d. a pound there. If Mr. Lindsay had looked in the Adelaide papers, which surely were within his reach, he would have found 1s. 2d. a dozen for large skins (and a dozen of these weigh 2 lb.) is the outside price going. This is exactly a quarter of Mr. Lindsay's estimate for large skins well preserved; and the others are either unsaleable or nearly so. Moreover, during a great part of the year there are no purchasers at any price, and the skins cost more than their value to keep. Mr. Lindsay, therefore, cannot persuade us who have tried it that the value of the skins makes rabbit-hunting remunerative. Mr. Lindsay was very loose in some of his facts and arguments, so that when he says the disease Professor Watson was bringing out was different from what the Professor thought it was, we are entitled to ask, how can Mr. Lindsay possibly know? Had he an opportunity of examining the diseased rabbits that died on board ship? He may have been right for aught I know, but he should have shown how he gained the information. I can congratulate Mr. Lindsay on wishing not to destroy the rabbits. No one unless he be a beast without a heart could be wantonly cruel to animals. But *Moriendum est* is for sufficient reasons the fixed decree of the public with reference to them, and it is not likely that Mr. Lindsay is even yet *in limine* of an argument that will change the public mind.

One word more. Mr. Lindsay used the insulting expression "Fools rush in," &c., perhaps because he had the quotation by heart. I do not know to whom Mr. Lindsay referred, the public-spirited Professor or myself. All I do know is to which of the three the words are applicable. I am unacquainted with the Professor, even by sight, but it is childish of a correspondent, because he happens to differ from informed and ignorant opinions, to apply to him or to a lowly citizen like myself words—well, words that are not permitted among gentlemen. I am not likely to go out of my way again or to waste your space to give Mr. Lindsay a lesson either in logic or manners. I thank you heartily, Sir, for your insertion of the several letters I have from time to time sent you. In gratitude I have endeavoured to be as brief as justice to each subject would allow.

I am, Sir, &c.,

E. M. URCOTT.

Mannum, July 6.

Register June 18th 1886
(From Home Correspondent)
London May 14th 1886

Rabbits

Last night South Australia was specially an object of enquiry in the House of Commons. The matter arose from a paragraph which appeared recently in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, which stated that in order to stay the rabbit plague in South Australia, another plague was to be introduced in the shape of the rabbit scab. For this purpose Professor Watson got six months' leave to collect half a dozen diseased rabbits on the Continent. These, however, died of sunstroke on the way out, but it was now contemplated to get another supply. The Home Ruler who brought this statement before the House of Commons implored the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies to make representations to the Government of South Australia, so that some other method should be adopted, rather than this "infernal device" should be developed. The Under-Secretary in his reply remarked that he believed his questioner was a Home Ruler, that the Colonial Office had no information upon the matter, and that if it had, the South Australian Government was quite able to look after its own interests.

Advertiser June 29th 1886
(Melbourne Telegrams)

In connection with the reported proposal of Professor Watson to introduce into South Australia diseased rabbits for the purpose of exterminating the pest, the Premier has written to the Premier of South Australia asking if the proposal is sanctioned by his Government, and requesting full particulars of the form of disease intended to be introduced. Mr. Gillies also pointed out the great injury which would be done to the meat preserving industry if the proposal was carried out.

Register June 29th 1886

THE RABBIT PLAGUE IN AUSTRALIA.—We quote the following from the *Langport* (Somersetshire) *Herald* of May 15:—"The latest attempt to exterminate rabbits in Australia ended in failure. It was a truly infernal device, namely, the importation of rabbits suffering from the rabbit scab from Europe, in the hope that the contagion would spread among the Australian rabbits and ultimately kill them off. Professor Watson, of Adelaide University, was granted six months' leave of absence in order that he might purchase diseased rabbits in Europe. He bought two dozen thoroughly infected with animal and vegetable parasites, and embarked on the *Caledonian* steamship with them; but, unfortunately for the experiment, they all died of sunstroke before reaching Aden, and the attempt has consequently failed. He has, however, ordered a fresh supply, and he is still in hopes that the rabbit scab may be successfully introduced."