

No. 4.

The AGENT-GENERAL to the Hon. the COLONIAL SECRETARY.

SIR,—

3rd December, 1886.

In continuation of my letter of the 20th October, No. 1304, on the subject of introducing disease among the rabbits, I transmit to you herewith copy of a correspondence I have had with Professor G. T. Brown, one of the scientific officers of the Agricultural Department of the Privy Council. You will see that he has a strong conviction of the inexpediency of any attempt to introduce a fatal contagious disease among them, and, unless you wish me to apply to other sources, I should rest satisfied with his advice.

I made inquiry at the Canada Office on the subject mentioned by Dr. Hector in his memorandum of the 1st September last, and the High Commissioner has been good enough to ask the Dominion Government to send over any information in their possession thereon.

I enclose a copy of Professor Brown's paper on swine-fever, which perhaps Dr. Hector would like to see.

The Hon. the Colonial Secretary, Wellington.

I have, &c.,

F. D. BELL.

Enclosure 1 in No. 4.

The AGENT-GENERAL to Professor BROWN.

SIR,—

7, Westminster Chambers, 26th November, 1886.

I beg permission, on the part of the Government of New Zealand, to bring the following matter under your consideration, in the hope that the scientific officers of the Agricultural Department may be able to give me their valuable advice upon a subject of great importance to all the Colonies of Australasia.

You are doubtless aware that for many years past the ravages committed in the pastoral territories of those colonies by the vast increase in the number of wild rabbits have rapidly extended to one district after another, until the rabbit-pest has become a formidable danger to the pastoral industry. There are about eighty million sheep in Australasia, fifteen millions of which are depastured in New Zealand; and, although the united efforts of the Government and the sheep-owners, helped by special legislation, have tended in some districts to check the progress of the pest, yet (taking the pastoral area of Australasia as a whole) what has been done seems so ineffectual that we are reaching a stage when, in many districts, the sheep will be exterminated if the rabbits are not.

Hitherto it has been tried to arrest the plague by shooting, by laying poison, and by introducing ferrets, stoats, and weasels. But a question has often arisen whether it would not be practicable to introduce some disease among the rabbits which should be more effectual for their destruction, and, among other suggestions, the red-measles of the pig has been spoke of as a disease which might be communicated to them. The matter was considered by Dr. Hector, F.R.S., Director of the Geological Survey in New Zealand, and he made a minute thereon, of which a copy is enclosed herewith. The recent publication of your valuable report on swine-fever has led me to think that your own researches may have brought together information which would be of great service, and I should be much obliged if you would give my Government the benefit of your advice.

One condition, I need hardly say, of introducing any disease, supposing its introduction to be practicable, is that there should be no danger to other animal life than that of rabbits; and the question, therefore, is whether such a step can be taken at all with safety to other animals, and especially, of course, to man. It is, accordingly, on this point, in the first instance, that I venture to ask your opinion; and next, what would be the best method of introducing any disease which would only attack the rabbits?

Professor G. T. Brown, Agricultural Department, Privy Council.

I have, &c.,

F. D. BELL.

Enclosure 2 in No. 4.

Professor BROWN to the AGENT-GENERAL.

SIR,—

44, Parliament Street, 1st December, 1886.

In reply to your letter of the 26th ultimo, referring to the destruction of rabbits in the Australasian Colonies, I beg to inform you that I entertain a strong conviction of the inexpediency of any attempt to introduce a fatal contagious disease among them for the purpose of effecting their destruction.

In regard to swine-fever, it is undoubtedly the case that rabbits may be infected with the disease by inoculation, but there is no evidence of its communicability from rabbit to rabbit by association. The same thing may be said of tuberculosis.

The introduction of any similar form of skin-disease, such as mange or ringworm, would probably aid in the extermination of the rabbits; but both diseases are readily communicable to other animals, and the parasite of ringworm might be transferred to man.

Under the circumstances, I am unable to suggest any measure beyond those which are usually employed, as guns, traps, snares, pitfalls, and the introduction of the smaller carnivora, stoats and weasels.

The Agent-General for New Zealand.

I have, &c.,

G. T. BROWN.

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