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PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA.

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REPORT BY CHIEF INSPECTOR

On the working of "The Stock Act, 1889," "The Rabbits Destruction Act, 1889," and "The Codlin Moth Act, 1888," for the Year 1898-1899.

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Stock Department, Hobart, 30th April, 1899.

SIR,

I HAVE the honour to furnish my Report under the Stock, Rabbits Destruction, Vegetation Diseases, and Codlin Moth Acts for the year 1898.

*Quarantine.*—The Quarantine Laws enforced upon imported sheep and cattle from countries wherein scab and cattle diseases exist have, up to this date, in Tasmania, proved to be an effectual block against the reintroduction of scab, or introduction of any cattle disease. The subject of quarantine from places outside the Australasian Colonies came under discussion at the Conference of Ministers of Agriculture held at Hobart on the 16th January last, and was favourably considered.

The reductions in the periods of quarantine upon sheep imported from England from 60 to 30 days will be a great boon to enterprising sheepbreeders, especially to those who are importing highly-bred animals, and who are further encouraged by relief from the quarantine charge of £2 2s. per head.

The quarantine upon cattle is reduced from 60 to 40 days, with the relief from the charge of £3 3s. per head of pure stock for breeding.

The deliberations of Ministers have been most beneficial in making the quarantine laws upon English stock uniform throughout the whole of the Colonies. These concessions are conditional upon the owners or importers furnishing a pedigree from the breeder that the stock is of pure breed, and also the production of a veterinary surgeon's certificate of freeness from disease, and that the cattle have satisfactorily undergone the tuberculin test.

*Australasian Quarantine and other restrictive Regulations.*—I regret having been compelled to recommend the Government to prohibit cattle, horses, and hides, also sheep, skins, or wool being introduced into Tasmania from Queensland, the prevalence and rapid spread of the Queensland Tick causing me to use this precautionary measure.

The prohibition of swine from New Zealand has also been given effect to, consequent upon an outbreak of Swine Fever being discovered in the province of Otago.

The prohibition has been renewed preventing English stock being admitted into Tasmania by vessels calling at the Cape, or that portion of South Africa south of the fifth parallel of south latitude, the introduction of rinderpest being feared.

I have been urged to relax the quarantine upon cattle from Australia, but so long as I hold my present position, with the convincing evidence at my command and practical experience, I shall not recommend the Government to reduce the quarantine period from six to three months. After reviewing and carefully considering the reports from the United States and Canadian Departments of Agriculture, which were obtained at the wish of branch Boards of Agriculture in Tasmania, my judgment is rather to request the Government to extend the present period of six months' quarantine to absolute prohibition from Australasia. Should cattle-breeders and owners be so unfortunate as to have pleuro-pneumonia introduced the result would be ruinous, and to exterminate it the most drastic measures would have to be resorted to, viz., slaughter.

Since the centralisation of Police I have placed myself in communication with the Commissioner, who has consented to the appointment of the Superintendents of Police as Inspectors under the Stock Acts. I beg to express my appreciation of the cordial assistance he has afforded, which will enable me to enforce the branding and dipping provisions of the Stock Act. Instructions have been issued by circular to take legal proceedings when sheep are discovered not conspicuously branded, and also when sheep are found undipped. Already prosecutions have been recorded for the former offence, and fines inflicted. Until the passing of the Police Regulation Act last

Session of Parliament I was powerless to enforce the valuable branding section of the Stock Act, which, if stringently carried out, must reduce the reported and unaccountable loss in sheep. With the assistance of the Police the inspections at sales will be thorough and complete.

During the coming Session of Parliament I purpose recommending the Government to amend the dipping provisions of the Stock Act, and for the reasons given in my Report for 1897.

The stock in the Colony, I estimate, will be greatly reduced from that of previous years, the drought of 1897, with the succeeding dry and hot season in the early part of 1898, being seriously felt by sheepowners. Had the latter period of 1898 not been most favourable to stock the losses would have been heavy. However, a better outlook exists throughout the whole of the Colony for 1899; grass is abundant, and, with the welcomed autumnal rains, fat sheep and cattle should be plentiful, and marketed of good quality. The prices, I apprehend, must rule high, brought about by the shortness of store stock in the Colony. Large numbers of store stock were introduced into the North West Coast last year when the duty was removed, which assisted owners in a slight degree to stock up; but still more are wanted, and inquiries come to the Department for particulars of import regulations with the view of further introductions, notwithstanding the duty of 2s. per head payable.

The stud sheep industry still flourishes, and the remunerative prices obtained at last season's Sydney and Melbourne sales will further stimulate merino breeders' efforts to improve their stud flocks. From personal inspection, I must remark, substantially sound lines are established in breeding merino sheep, due to judicious mating and selection, without the introduction of foreign blood, which seems to a few people essential. Undoubted characteristics of the merino type, quality, and quantity of wool, with grand constitutions and qualifications that please the taste of judges, are to be found in the paddocks of Tasmanian breeders. I have no hesitation in remarking that the 1899 shipment of stud merino sheep to the Sydney sales will undoubtedly be the finest lot that have ever been exported from Tasmania.

The Shropshire sheepbreeders are coming into prominence. The increasing demand in Australasia and New Zealand for this meat breed of sheep is most satisfactory, and it is encouraging to learn that our breeders are deriving remunerative values for sheep that can be spared. The establishment of the Tasmanian Shropshire Flock Book is a step not to be regretted by breeders, seeing that pedigree and entrance therein are now essential recommendations for satisfactory sales.

*Rabbits Destruction Act.*—The centralisation of Police, with officers having a practical knowledge of the habits of the pest, and the most approved modes of destruction, will be an additional lever to compel uniform and simultaneous action being taken to deal with all pests, rabbits in particular. Inspectors in all districts must work with the object of eradication, and that desired end can only be accomplished by combination, uniformity, and judicious expenditure of capital. If all interested will severally and jointly use endeavours the pest must be reduced below the degree of injury, bordering, in some instances, upon ruin to the farmers. From past experiences I am afraid considerable pressure and compulsion will be necessary to make some owners comply with an Act which is a monetary benefit to themselves. One of the great advantages rabbits have to increase is attributable to the tenant, who will not destroy for permanent good, but only performs sufficient work to arrest the action of an inspector. The landlord is equally blamable when he extracts far more rent than should be expected, leaving the tenant a sorry margin for working expenses and a small interest upon his necessary expenditure, so that, in reality, he is little better than an unpaid overseer with all responsibility and no profits, and until the tenant and landlord work hand in hand, having interests in common, I question much if the rabbit will not establish its supremacy. A difficult problem of this great question is the mode of destruction. I have had my attention repeatedly drawn to cases where the right to trap upon properties has been sold to the trapper. This is a profitable investment; the carcase and the skin are marketed, but the owner suffers by allowing summer increase of the material, and the neighbour's run is denuded of grass. So long as this mode has the moral support of some landowners the decrease of rabbits cannot be assured. For this reason the trapper is well posted of the local demand for food supply, which he rather under than over estimates, because, if the latter, the surplus will be a loss by becoming unfit for consumption, so that he does not kill to decrease, but to establish winter work, with a good paying and permanent livelihood.

The most successful reduction of rabbits has been accomplished by the employment of permanent labour to destroy over a certain prescribed area at yearly wages. Holding the opinion that only by the stringent enforcement of the Act rabbits will be destroyed, I have addressed, with the consent of the Commissioner of Police, a memorandum to the Inspectors of Stock, who are also Superintendents of Police, intimating to them the way in which I desire the work to be performed. The following are the particulars:—

*The Rabbits Destruction Act, 53 Vict. No. 42.*—The unoccupied Crown lands must be inspected, and when rabbits are found to be numerous labour must be employed to deal with the pest. Laying phosphorised grain and pollard is the best method. The rate per man per diem must not exceed 5s., and it will be necessary to advise me before employing labour, so that money can be provided. Give instructions to inspect properties, and when rabbits are found numerous and the owners not doing sufficient work, serve a notice under Section 10. Inspect at the expiration of the time named in the 11th Section (7 days), and if satisfactory work has not been performed it will be prudent to inspect again with the officer, so that you may have corroborative evidence. You will experience many difficulties in obtaining convictions, but failure must not deter perseverance. A Monthly Report is necessary under the Act, naming the properties inspected, with date of inspection, the state of the rabbits thereon, and the mode of

working. Where trappers are employed and are marketing for their own benefit you will compel them to perform work all over the property simultaneously, and not permit them to work only one or two favoured spots while they allow rabbits to increase outside for their future profit. This mode of destruction has been detrimental to the Colony, and means increase and spread of the pest.

In reports for the year 1897 remarks are made,—“rabbits scarce and not numerous;” but still unaccountably large “takes” of rabbits are shown when the numbers killed are noted monthly, and I cannot reconcile these anomalies. The district that has assumed the lead in rabbit destruction above all others is that of Campbell Town. The owners levy a rate under the Act, provide their own inspector, and give him a free hand to carry out the duties, the result being most effective and creditable. I assume this district, with its proved success of the working of the Act, will continue its endeavours toward extermination. To travel the district now, as compared with a few years since, the contrast is marked to a great degree.

*The Vegetation Diseases Act.*—The passing of this Act must be beneficial to the Colony, and with its stringent enforcement many garden pests can be prevented from gaining entrance into Tasmania. The whole of the Australasian Colonies are working upon uniform lines for the exclusion of pests injurious particularly to the fruit industry, and strict inspection at the ports of entry is now the established practice.

*Scale Pests.*—The system adopted to prevent their introduction is to treat all fruit in the exporting colony in air-tight chambers for one hour with hydrocyanic acid gas under the supervision of a Government Inspector. Fruit so operated upon for scale only, and carrying an inspector's certificate, is admitted. This system, to be effective, requires great care and attention on the part of the supervising inspector. Unfortunately, this method is ineffectual, as a remedy for the codlin moth or fruit fly, so that in Tasmania, outside the fumigation for scale, inspections have to be made, especially of fruit from Victoria, New South Wales, and Queensland. A consignment of 400 cases of peaches from Sydney, treated under hydrocyanic acid gas, and carrying an inspector's certificate, were found infested with fruit fly maggot in an active state, and were all returned to the exporting colony by first steamer. In Launceston 48 cases of peaches were found similarly infested and were destroyed, but still, with this precaution, the Mediterranean fruit fly has located itself in four gardens in Launceston.

The scale most to be dreaded, and one that has established itself in Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, and Western Australia, is the San José. Already New South Wales has something like 18 centres of infection. Consequently it becomes a serious matter for Tasmanian importers to ascertain before ordering or importing cuttings and scions that the nursery from whence they are introduced is clean and free from San José Scale. To provide against the chance of introducing so pernicious a scale regulations are in force to compel all trees and cuttings that are imported into Tasmania under the necessary certificate being immersed in, or fumigated by, some approved insect-destroying preparation on arrival, so that perfect safety from so dreaded an orchard pest can be assured.

*Fumigating Chambers.*—The following firms and exporters have, with full approval, constructed fumigating chambers under the supervision of the Inspector of Public Buildings:—H. Jones & Co., Wilson Williams, J. G. Turner, Messrs. Roberts & Co., W. D. Peacock & Co., Knight & Co., Wright Bros., and the owner of the steam-ketch *Ship Jack* (James Rowe).

*Codlin Moth.*—This is a difficult subject to approach, but nevertheless, being appointed by the Government to enforce the provisions of the Act, I shall not be found shirking my responsibility. In some districts this Act is a perfect sham, and a leading journal in the adjoining colony ridicules the way in which justice is meted out. The one instance quoted is where the Chairman of the Glenorchy Fruit Board was prosecuted for conveying infected fruit. The inspector informed the magistrate that the codlin grub was crawling upon the outside of the bags and dropping on to the road, and that when the carter was detained he told the inspector the bags contained potatoes. The inspector informed the bench this was an exceedingly gross case. This infringement of the law was considered by the magistrate and satisfied by the minimum fine of 10s. and costs—the maximum fine for such an offence being £10. Again, I considered it my duty to request the Government to approach the Governor in Council to dispense with the New Norfolk Fruit Board, for the following reasons:—The Chairman of this Fruit Board, who is an inspector (as are all members of the Board), declined, after bringing a breach of the law under my notice, to prosecute the late Treasurer of the Board for conveying infected fruit from one part of the Colony to another part. The Chairman's dereliction of duty forced the Chief Inspector to prosecute, which resulted in a verdict of “guilty.” The Chairman also declined to prosecute after reporting a case where a member of his Board sold infected fruit to himself (the Chairman), causing the Chief Inspector to take action.—Case dismissed. Two other members of this Board were prosecuted for conveying infected fruit; one was fined 10s. costs, the other pleaded guilty, but the bench dismissed the case.

The action of this Board I consider most reprehensible, seeing that the members are all inspectors, and should strictly enforce the law. It opens up a question of great magnitude as to the probability of all interested bodies being willing to administer gratuitously an Act that will subject themselves to penalties for non-performance of its provisions. Some members of the New Norfolk Board have clearly indicated by their action that they will break, and have broken, the

law, notwithstanding their having been elected by fruitgrowers in that district to fairly and equitably enforce its provisions. Some fruit boards are performing their work satisfactorily, and are exhibiting energy in dealing with the codlin moth pest. The early part of December last was greatly in favour of orchardists; the heavy showers made the moth's work less destructive than at that date in previous years; orchardists were jubilant, and some went so far as to remark that the days of the codlin moth were numbered. However, when the dry hot weather of January and February of 1899 set in the illusion was dispelled, and apparently the moth has been more destructive and numerous than in former years. As I have previously mentioned, some fruit boards work with a will to eradicate or control the pest, when possibly the adjoining boards are not stringently carrying out the law, forgetful that to subdue orchard pests strict attention to the law must be observed, and the work in fruit districts must be continuously, uniformly, and doggedly persevered with, the present almost universal perfunctory action being fatal to success.

In concluding this Report I have to express my approval at the manner in which the officers of this Department have performed their duties, with the ready acquiescence to return to office, when pressure of work necessitated it, after business hours.

I much regret the loss of Mr. J. C. Penny from this office after his association with the Department and myself for over Twenty-nine years; his services in the position he now occupies, I feel assured, will be a benefit to the Colony, and am satisfied will be appreciated by the Surveyor-General, his present head.

I have the honour to be,  
Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

THOMAS A. TABART, *Chief Inspector.*

*The Right Honourable the Minister for Agriculture.*