

Veterinary Notes for the Farmer

Yew Poisoning

VARIOUS species of plants have from time to time been associated with mortality in stock. In many cases where deaths have taken place from otherwise unaccountable causes, grave suspicion has been entertained that the mortality was due to the ingestion of certain plants, although the evidence has been insufficient to warrant a definite diagnosis. Other instances occur where abundant proof exists that the plant in question is of a poisonous nature and that death has been due to the stock eating it.

Included in this group designated "poisonous plants" is the tree technically known as *Taxus baccata* and commonly called English Yew. Numerous instances are recorded of mortalities having occurred as a result of stock eating the leaves which contain the very toxic alkaloid taxine. Among the several varieties of yew is included that known as Irish Yew or *Taxus fastigiata* which has also been associated with death among stock.

Death Generally Rapid

A feature of yew poisoning is the rapidity with which death occurs.

Generally the period which elapses between the time at which the plant is eaten and that at which death ensues is very short, in fact in some cases the animal will drop dead while in the act of eating the plant. Where death is less rapid the animal may show symptoms of blowing and trembling before eventually collapsing.

Although this is the general rule cases occur in which death takes place a considerable number of hours after the plant has been eaten. This is seen in the following case.

Case in Detail

Thirty calves were bought in the saleyards on June 3, and that evening were put into



a section used as a recreation park, the intention of the owner being to hold them there for the night. Growing in the park were numerous trees and shrubs, among them being English yew trees of considerable age and height, pasture in the park was very short. Next morning seven of the calves were found dead.

As the remaining 23 calves evidently appeared quite healthy, they were put into the saleyards on June 4 where they were bought by a local farmer. The calves were transported to the purchaser's farm on the evening of the 4th, but the farmer was not present when they arrived; next morning he found two calves dead on the unloading bank at the farm and three others dead in the paddock.

The dead calves in the park were examined on the morning of the 5th, also an examination was made of the shrubs and trees growing there. From the examination it was evident that the foliage on the lower part of an English yew tree had been recently chewed.

On examination of the live calves at the farm to which they had been brought, one appeared sick. The calves were driven down the paddock towards the yards and while this particular calf was being examined one of the other calves which had appeared quite healthy and had been grazing a few

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