

ON THE LAND

This wide land, with its great range of climates, is necessarily a land of pests (writes the Sydney correspondent of an exchange). Some, like the politicians, are always with us; some come and go—and the latter are generally the more interesting.

The great accumulation of wheat in south-eastern Australia has bred some curious things. Everyone, last year, heard about the mice—the countless millions of tiny rodents which suddenly appeared from nowhere, and moved across wide tracts of country like a devastating wave. The cold weather, the inevitable diseases, and the ingenuity of man cut great swathes in the mice ranks, but the pest, although reduced, is still very formidable.

Then came flocks of birds, massing from mysterious ends of the earth to gorge and gorge again on the spilt grain. They were almost a blessing in that they cleared away the waste, but when they learned to raid the stacks and burrow through good jute sacks in search of yellow treasure, man had to use great quantities of poison and powder. This pest, too, was checked, but by no means removed.

And now comes the weevil, not so much as a destroyer of wheat—he made his debut in that capacity last year, but as a plague to mankind. Let us tell the story of Goulburn. The authorities have accumulated in this prosperous town great stacks of wheat, and in this the weevils—both the black fly and the flea-like parasite—have multiplied to such an extent that they have been forced to seek new pastures. They are spread out over the town by every wind that blows; they fasten on to the skin and bite like a sandfly or a tick, they invade kitchens and get into foodstuffs, and they make life a burden generally. The whole town is suffering acutely from the pest. Last Wednesday, the wind being right, the weevil in countless thousands attended the meeting of the Goulburn Racing Club, and, as one sporting writer put it, "took all the pep out of the search for sure things. The weevils made everything on two legs a winning post. Otherwise sport languished." The meeting was not abandoned, but the weevil by its activities attracted as much interest and frantic attention as the closest finish. The weevil appears to have become a real pest in Goulburn, and has caused considerable alarm, but it has, thus far, appeared elsewhere in only a minor form.

ASHES AS A SOURCE OF POTASH.

Potash is one of the chief manures required in the garden, and it is also one of the most expensive to purchase. The present European war has also had an effect upon potash supplies, as we chiefly depended upon Germany for our supply. It has been found, however, that the ashes of hedge trimmings and other vegetable refuse, which usually collects very freely in a garden, is a valuable source of potash, and actually contains from eight to twelve per cent. of this element.

The potash contained in ashes is very soluble, being in the form of carbonate; the consequence is that the ashes, to have full value, must be kept dry. It has been found that a slight shower is sufficient to wash out one-half of the potash, and reduce the percentage from eight or ten, to four or five.

The best method, is, of course, to store the ashes until they are required. If this is not possible, they should be used as a top-dressing on a growing crop. Crops that are greatly assisted by wood ashes are onions, peas, beans, tomatoes, strawberries, potatoes, turnips. In fact, all and sundry are benefited by wood ashes.

KEEPING AWAY SPARROWS.

These are acknowledged to be a pest by all gardeners. Especially trying are their attentions to young cabbages, savoy, broccoli, kale, and such plants. Even black cotton does not seem to terrify the audacious rascals. This year (states the writer of "Horticultural Notes" in the *N.Z. Farmer*), after making my seeds

secure, as I thought, with cotton, I was surprised one morning on going to look at the seedlings, to find that the sparrows had been busy and pulled up hundreds of plants. I did not know what to do to preserve the remainder, but tried dusting them with flowers of sulphur, and this seemed surprisingly successful, for after that they left the plants severely alone.

JOHNSON GRASS.

Johnson grass (*Sorghum halepense*) has been grown in New Zealand in a few places in the North Island, and has been tested at the experimental farms (states the *Journal of Agriculture* in answer to a correspondent). It produced a rough, coarse hay in fairly heavy quantities. Owing to its spreading underground stems—being in this particular far worse than twitch—it has never become popular in New Zealand. Although hardy as a general rule, it is likely in the South Island to be cut with severe frosts. Sudan grass, a plant that has recently been very extensively advocated as a summer forage or annual hay crop, is almost identical with Johnson grass, except that it is at most a biennial, and does not possess underground stems. If Johnson grass could be kept in bounds it might be valuable as summer forage and for the production of coarse hay, but it would certainly be a safer policy to use Sudan grass. Johnson grass grows fairly well on lands that are not too dry, but where moisture is deficient the yield is comparatively low.

POPLARS AS WIND-BREAKS.

In some districts poplars have been used for wind-break purposes, preference being given to the erect-growing Lombardy type (stated Mr. J. H. Simmonds in a paper read under the auspices of the Auckland Education Board). Much may be said in their favor. They are easily propagated from either cuttings or suckers. In moist situations they make very rapid growth. They are soft to prune, and freely sprout again from the mutilated part. They are leafy in summer when shelter is needed and bare in winter when it is not needed. They are long-lived. Against them it may be urged that they require very careful management to keep them sufficiently dense at the base; that they grow very tall, and must be rather frequently cut back; that their wood is almost worthless for domestic fuel; and, lastly, that they are liable to give a great deal of trouble by throwing up suckers. It may be possible to prevent their roots from spreading and suckering by maintaining a deep trench on either side of the row or belt; but examples noted by the writer in travelling about have shown that the task is not easy, and is often not successfully accomplished. Certainly, any person thinking of planting poplars near his orchard should first consider what tax is likely to be imposed upon his labor in keeping these trees down to a proper height and in controlling or eradicating the suckers that may spring up from their roots.

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