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EXTERMINATING THE PRICKLY PEAR.

H. H. Lewcock, B.Sc.

If the experiments to be made in Australia for the eradication of prickly pear prove as successful as they are reported to have been in Bermuda, another important triumph will be added to the growing list which already stands to the credit of patient and persevering scientific investigation. As a cable message we published on Thursday last indicated, Mr. Lewcock, the mycologist of the Commonwealth Prickly Pear Board, has discovered a bacterial disease which promises great things. The bacilli have an enormous power of reproduction, and they are said to destroy rapidly "large healthy plants, which seem to lack any natural resistance" to the disease set up. There is nothing new in the suggestion that the pest, which is devastating large areas in Queensland and to a less extent is also destructive in New South Wales, should be attacked by a natural enemy in the form either of insects or of bacteria. For years past efforts have been made in the northern State to grapple with the trouble, which has become so serious that in 1922 it was estimated that there were thirty million acres of holdings affected, while a later computation puts the infested areas in New South Wales at approximately six million acres. In almost any country except Australia such devastation would mean ruin, and even here, with our vast unoccupied spaces, we cannot afford to treat the matter lightly, especially as the noxious growth has shown such a surprising tendency to spread. As far back as 1912 the Government of Queensland were so impressed with the gravity of the situation that they appointed a commission to investigate the methods adopted for dealing with the pest in other parts of the world. The enquiries had good results in some directions, and but for the intervention of the Great War, which arrested useful work in many departments, there is little reason to doubt that still further progress would have been made before now. The Commission returned convinced that the most promising means of combating the pest was the use of parasitical insects or a fungous disease. Of course, experiments on such lines needed to be carried out with caution, and the introduction of the exterminating agents could be permitted only after sufficient knowledge of their action had been acquired to make it reasonably probable that the remedy would not in the end prove worse than the original pest. Carried out under proper control, research work with such agents does not involve a very serious risk. Mr. Lewcock made his preliminary investigations with the bacteria in the Cornell University hothouse.

To the trained scientist the laboratory is a miniature world. There he satisfies himself of the various possibilities which attach to any course he proposes to adopt, and he is able to foresee what the most probable results will be. In Australia the prickly pear problem is rendered particularly difficult by reason of the numerous species which have become acclimatised. There are at least ten or a dozen known to exist, and these have different characteristics, and require to be dealt with by varying methods. The introduction of the wild cochineal insect several years ago proved effective so far as one species, the *Opuntia monacantha*, was concerned. Although attempts to control the growth of other species of the cactus in a similar way did not give satisfactory results, the success with this one stimulated investigation. Obviously if any means for the utilisation of the prickly pear could be discovered, that would be the best of all solutions, but the various experiments which have been made do not encourage the hope that success will be attained. Only recently an entirely adverse report was given after experiments had been carried out for the production of commercial alcohol, the quantity of sugar contained in the plants being altogether too small for the purpose. Nor have attempts to utilise the prickly pear, or portions of it, for fodder been any more successful. It appears to be simply a member of the ground, and one whose

extermination must be accomplished. So noxious is it that in Queensland Prickly Pear Selection leases may be obtained in perpetuity for areas up to 2,560 acres, at a peppercorn rental, if demanded, for the first thirty years, and thereafter at one and a half per cent. of the unimproved value of the land. The problem, like all others which confront investigators, presents many interesting phases, as well as great difficulties. Mr. Lewcock is still prosecuting his enquiries, and intends to revisit Bermuda later this year before transferring his experiments to Australia. If it can be satisfactorily established that the disease will not attack useful species of vegetation, its introduction into the affected parts of Australia should be welcomed. It is not claimed for it that it will be the sole agent in ridding this continent of a formidable pest, but it may make an important contribution to that desirable end.

REG. also ADV. 8.2.24

At a meeting of the Council of the School of Mines on Monday, the President (Sir Langdon Bonython) said:—"At the meeting of this council, held before the Christmas holidays, we little thought that Professor Rennie was attending for the last time, and that when we again gathered round this table he would have passed away. We have special reasons for deploring our loss. He was one of the original members of the council, and although his service had not been without a break it had extended over many years, and, by reason of his scientific attainments and great knowledge of educational matters, had been of the highest value, placing not only this institution, but, through its students, the whole community under obligations. His death came as a shock to his friends. I had congratulated him only a few days before on having recovered his health and his old vigour, which without reservation he admitted. There is no occasion for me to attempt to tell the story of his life, or to comment on the important part he had taken in the building up of the University and the School of Mines and Industries. That has been done, evoking expressions of admiration from all sections of the people, as he was widely known and everywhere esteemed. His most prominent characteristic was unselfishness. That is a characteristic appreciated by all but possessed by few. He might have lived in the popular memory as a great chemist—he had all the necessary gifts—but he chose to devote his life to the service of others rather than to worry about personal aggrandisement. He never courted publicity, but the work of the hour, whatever it might be, was carried out with zeal and thoroughness. Duty done was his reward. A friend to all and ever ready to be helpful, it is hardly surprising that Professor Rennie was regarded with genuine affection by the many students with whom he had been associated during the long period of 40 years. And these kindly relations were not confined to students. Their good opinion was fully shared by council and senate members, professors, lecturers, instructors and officials connected with the University and the School of Mines, and they had, as will be realized, abundant opportunities of estimating his character. Sir George Murray, the Chancellor of the University, has said that Professor Rennie endeared himself to all by his uprightness, his sincerity of purpose, and his unswerving devotion to duty. That is a summing-up of the personality of the professor which I am sure members of this council will endorse. May I add that there can be no doubt that the good man who has passed from us has joined the Choir Invisible of those immortal dead who live again in minds made better by their presence." Professor Chapman moved that the President's remarks be recorded in the minutes, and that a letter of condolence be sent to the family. He had been intimately associated with Professor Rennie for many years, and endorsed everything that had been said by the President. For many years he had never taken any step of importance at the University without talking it over first with Professor Rennie, than whom kindlier counsellor never was, and the University would hardly seem the same place without him. The motion was seconded by Hon. D. M. Charleston, and carried unanimously.



Mr. K. LEWCOCK, Mycologist of the Commonwealth Prickly Pear Board, who has discovered bacteria for the eradication of the prickly pear. He will shortly conduct experiments in Australia.

NEWS. 8.2.24

LEAVING EXAMINATION

Entries for Supplementary Test

Entries for the supplementary leaving examination, which began at Adelaide University today, closely approximate a record. Although the closing date was the last week in January entries have been received almost daily since then. The number has now reached 192. Examinations are held at Adelaide and at a few country centres. The last will be conducted next Monday. Results will be available shortly after. The date cannot be ascertained until examination papers are received from country centres. The supplementary examination is held in February to enable intending University students to complete the leaving certificate required for entrance to the University.

ADV. 9.2.24

EXAMINATION ENTRIES.

Approximately a record has been established in the number of entries for the supplementary leaving examination which began at the University of Adelaide yesterday. The closing date for receiving entries was fixed for the last week in January, but entries have been coming in daily until the number now reaches 192. The examinations are held in Adelaide and at a few country centres, and the last will be held next Monday. The results will be made known as soon as the papers from the country centres are dealt with. The date for the examination is fixed at this period of the year to enable successful candidates at once to go on to the University.

NEWS 9.2.24

Sir George Murray (Chief Justice) has been appointed Deputy Governor during the absence in New Zealand of His Excellency Sir Tom Bridges.

ADV. 10.2.24

The Rev. Dr. W. S. Milne, who has resigned the offices of precentor of St. Peter's Cathedral and Bishop's vicar, will leave for Melbourne as soon as arrangements can be made for the appointment of his successor. That will probably be in April, and he will live in retirement. Dr. Milne was born in Dundee, Scotland, and he came to Adelaide as bishop's vicar in January, 1890. After leaving the Dundee High School, he was engaged in business pursuits for several years, but, deciding to enter the Christian ministry in 1879, he went to Oxford. He graduated in 1884, and took his M.A. in 1886, B.D. in 1889, and D.D. in 1905. He resigned the offices of senior curate at St. Mary Magdalene's Church, Oxford, and tutor and lecturer in theology and Hebrew at Oxford, to come to Adelaide in 1880.

THE MEDICAL CONGRESS.

TREATMENT OF CRIPPLES.

Wellington, February 9. The Medical Congress to-day discussed the treatment of crippled soldiers and children.

Dr. Newland, of Adelaide, said the establishment of orthopaedic hospitals in the war became urgently necessary because many men had ununited or badly united fractures, injuries to joints, and other disabilities, which threatened to lead to permanent deformities. Dealing with post-war treatment, Dr. Newland said it was surprising how little a shortening of the limb developed after the fracture of a thigh. This was the result of skilled orthopaedic treatment.

Dr. Wade (Sydney) said accepting American figures as a basis, there would be 9,000 cripples, 3,000 being under the age of 21; in New Zealand and in Australia 36,000 and 12,000 respectively. There was a necessity to stir up public opinion on the education and treatment of crippled young people.

Colonel Wylie (New Zealand) said propaganda was not necessary here, as gratefully impressed relatives had spread propaganda to show the public the vocational training and academic education being given in orthopaedic hospitals in the Dominion.

Dr. Royle (Sydney) suggested curative workshops in connection with industry as institutions for the education of crippled children.

Other speakers said insurance companies should realise the need for the establishment of large orthopaedic centres.

Colonel Carbery condemned orthopaedic treatment for prospective soldiers, maintaining that it tended to induce malingering at a later period. He would exclude those in factories with disabilities from active service.

Sir George Syme (Melbourne) dealt with the surgical aspect of the hydatid disease, saying that accumulated experience led to a modification of many earlier views. They had now adopted general principles.

Dr. Bond, of Leicester, had introduced an operation eminently satisfactory for cysts in the spleen, kidneys, and small cysts in the liver, and Dr. Hamilton Russell, of Melbourne, had introduced a method of dealing with larger cysts, which Dr. Syme considered the best treatment for them.

REG. 10.2.24

The Thornber Bursary has been awarded to Margaret Cleland, of Walford House School, Unley. The bursary has been founded by the old scholars of the Unley Park School, to perpetuate the memory of their late head mistress, Miss Thornber. The bursary is open to girls of the South Australian secondary schools, and is given on the results of the leaving examination. This is the first award which has been made. Margaret Cleland passed the leaving in English, history, Latin (with credit), French, Botany (with credit), mathematics i., and mathematics ii.

REG. 11.2.24 FIFTY YEARS AGO. REG. 11.2.24

From The Register, Friday, February 9, 1877. Mr. G. C. Hawker, M.A., M.P., has resigned his seat as a member of the Council of the University of Adelaide.

NEWS. 14.2.24

Miss Eileen Reed, B.Sc. (lecturer in botany at Perth University) has returned from Canada after having spent two years as exchange lecturer in botany at the University of Toronto. Dr. Gertrude Wright of that university was the exchange at Perth. Miss Reed will stay in Adelaide for a few weeks with her parents, Rev. W. and Mrs. Reed, of Hyde Park, before resuming her work at Perth.

NEWS. 14.2.24

Prof. R. W. Chapman, M.A. (Professor of Engineering at Adelaide University) has notified Adelaide City Council that he will accept the position as one of the adjudicators for designs for the new City Bridge.