

# INVISIBLE RATS

by "SUNDOWNER"

I WAS surprised to read today, in a paper on James Little, by P. G. Stevens, that Japan's half million sheep are nearly all Corriedales. It surprises me that Japan has half a million sheep of any breed, now that Manchuria has been lost, but half a million Corriedales make me wonder when they arrived and where they now graze. In 1946, on the main island of Honshu, I saw two Corriedales, both in a zoo. I knew that they were Corriedales by the notice on their pen, and was interested to see that New Zealand was named as their "source country." But they bore about the same resemblance to James Little's Corriedales as the cow in a Hottentot kraal bears to Floresta Regina May of Edendale.

**MARCH 14** I knew that they were Corriedales by the notice on their pen, and was interested to see that New Zealand was named as their "source country." But they bore about the same resemblance to James Little's Corriedales as the cow in a Hottentot kraal bears to Floresta Regina May of Edendale.

It is possible that in the northern island of Hokkaido there are sheep farms that would be recognised as sheep farms in New Zealand, but even there the demand for root and grain crops must be strong enough to keep sheep off every acre capable of cultivation. This is, of course, a reason why the sheep for which the Japanese do find room will be Corriedales rather than Romneys, Lincolns, Leicesters, Southdowns, or Merinos; but ninety million people on an area not much bigger than New Zealand leave very little leg room for sheep. They could hold the sheep in pens and feed them on concentrates—the horrible new method we have lately been hearing about from Australia; but I don't think they have come to that yet in Japan.

The fact is that religion as well as land hunger makes sheep farming very difficult in Japan. The two national religions, Shinto and Buddhism, both condemn the eating of meat, though I wondered when I was there whether they

do so because meat is scarce or whether meat is scarce because eating it is forbidden.

I WAS apparently too complacent when I regarded the rat the cat brought home as a lost and solitary wanderer. Rats get pride of place in the latest issue of the Journal of Agriculture, and one of the authorities quoted in the article on rats gives this table as a guide to numbers:

If none seen, 0 to 20 are present.  
If occasionally seen, 20 to 200.  
If often seen, more than 200 are present.

Those are farm figures, and I can't just ignore them by calling mine a farm-let. They are for the

**MARCH 16** farms of Iowa, U.S.A., one of the corn and hog States, and the holdings I saw there were about as big as dairy farms here. The only question seems to be whether I have 20 rats or 200. If I have 20, I don't know where they sleep by day, and what they do by night. If I have 200, they must be winged, like the flying foxes of Queensland, eat the fruit I blame the opossums for taking, and return to the bush before daylight.

Whether I have 20, 200 or none, it is a horrifying thought that the rat population of the whole Dominion "must number millions," and that "one hundred rats eat one ton of wheat per year." We seem also to have a breed for every situation: *Rattus rattus*, the black, ship, roof, or house rat; *Rattus norvegicus*, the brown, water, or sewer rat; with, I am sure, an endless list of hybrids—roof rats that live under floors, sewer rats with a fondness for restaurants, ship rats that never sail the sea. The only rat we seem not to have is the Egyptian rat that destroyed the basilisk—and that one, I have learnt from a footnote in T. H. White's recent translation of a 12th Century Bestiary, could have been a weasel.

By pitting our wits against theirs, our science against their prolificacy (three to five litters a year, of perhaps seven young at a time, from about three months of age), and our invisible weapons against their wariness, we may succeed in controlling them, but never, the article says in black letters, in completely eradicating them. The next time my cat offers me a dead rat, whether it is black or brown or black and brown, I shall disinfect my spade before I bury it in case I am left with bubonic plague, or murine typhus, or salmonellosis, or Weil's disease, or some horrible combination of them all gathered up in the filthy nocturnal ramblings of their hosts from Pharaoh's cesspits to my poultry yard. I am liable to them all, it would seem, and with most of my countrymen I deserve them all, for my negligence in the rat war.

**AT** Addington yesterday I bought a two-tooth Romney ram. I bought him because he was young, restless, masculine, and aggressive. In the yards he was one of twelve, all equally good to my untutored eye, but not all as conscious as he seemed of his mission in life. But when I brought him home two of my pets attacked him, a wether and a ewe, both two-tooths like himself, and in a few minutes they had him completely bewildered. If he defended himself on one side he

**MARCH 18** was charged from the other side, not playfully, but with malice, and when two more pets joined in he disgraced himself, and shamed me, by allowing himself to be butted out of the pen. This morning I would not have been surprised if he had been missing; but although he was still on the property he was as far away as he could get, with his two tormentors feeding a little distance away, and keeping him under observation. That it was hostile observation I saw when I went closer, because two things then happened: the ram tried to get farther away from me, and as soon as he moved the pets rushed to the attack again and chased him into the shelter of a pine plantation. It was all a painful proof of the boldness of animals on their own stamping ground, and of their loss of morale when their world of familiar things crumbles.

(To be continued)

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A section of Kawerau township

## Life at Kawerau

**LIFE IN A NEW TOWN—KAWERAU** is the subject of three programmes which will be heard shortly from main National stations. Barbara Basham and Peter Latham, of Wellington, journeyed north to spend a few days in this busy new provincial town, which is rising at great speed from what, until a couple of years ago, was a broad expanse of farming country. The pulp and paper mill which is the cause of it all is now almost completed, and soon the first orders to be fulfilled should be rolling along the new railway line to the new port at Tauranga. Kawerau's population is an interesting heterogeneous one, with specialists in paper-making, forestry and engineering from all over the world, and their families living in the hundreds of recently-built houses. Barbara Basham's and Peter Latham's interviews with these people who are building a new industry and town will be heard on the YA and YZ Women's Sessions at 11.0 a.m. on Wednesday, April 13; on the Main National Programme at 9.30 a.m. on Sunday, April 17, and at the same time the following Sunday.