

# Pests and Parasites

by "SUNDOWNER"

IT is not pleasant to admit that we have rats; or delicate, or dignified. But with rats the truth will out. Though we have never had them before, they now scamper over our ceilings every night and wake us with loud thumps before daylight. It may be only one pair, and it may be a whole family.

I don't know how to estimate rat numbers by sound, but I hope it is not the same with sound as the experts say it is with sight: that if we see one rat we must suppose we have ten, and if we see more than one we are certain to have 20 or 30. I have not seen any. I know, however, that I have more than one, and I am not going to think about the others in the meantime. My problem is how to kill those two if my cat will not.

Bulletin No. 30 of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (Her Majesty's Stationery Office) says that I must begin with a survey of the situation, fixing the territorial limits of the infestation, the density and distribution of the population, and the details of any previous control measures applied. If I find only a small number of rats scattered over a large area, it will be sufficient, I am assured, to use traps for the wanderers and cyanide for those that stay in their holes. If, however, I find rats present in substantial numbers, I must resort to poison baiting. For this operation the Bulletin gives me half a page on suitable "bait bases," three-quarters of a page on suitable poisons, and nearly a page on the methods of baiting. Our own *Journal of Agriculture* is briefer, but not much more encouraging. I could, of course, burn the house down. But I think I will just starve the cat.

IT was stated the other day by a visiting expert from Australia that one reason why myxomatosis has failed in New Zealand is because our rabbits have no fleas. He did not say that we

should give them fleas, or I might find myself asking God to give him ticks, and warble flies, and tape worms, and a few more of the para-

APRIL 20 sites that torment rabbits in Europe and America; but he did say that as long as they have no fleas our rabbits will laugh at myxo. Let them laugh. If we can't destroy them without the aid of loathsome parasites we had better think a little harder.

I read recently the life of an American rabbit written by a Wisconsin biologist. Though I have a suspicion that the rabbit was a hare, it was invaded by ticks and fleas a day or two after it was born. For about eight months in each of its brief years it was tormented by warble flies. Mosquitoes worried it almost continuously from a few weeks after the winter thaw till the frosts came again. Before it was a year old it had a lump on its shoulder caused by encysted tape-worm larvae, developed from eggs it had swallowed with some grass. From these it had no hope of escape without assistance from a hawk or a coyote or a fox or a wild cat. It did, once a year, get rid of its warble fly grub, which bored its way out when it was about an inch long and left a hole which took a week or two to heal. It occasionally scratched off a tick, but when it was lucky enough to do that the head or mandibles of the tick remained behind to start an irritating sore. It had no defence against its fleas, none against the swarms of mosquitoes, and no possibility of escape from another warble fly egg. Costly though our rabbits are, I would sooner go on paying their price than strike a bargain with tape worms and ticks.

I HAVE often suspected that the revisers of the Bible took too much out of it. Now I am sure they did. Job acquired patience not only from the discipline of boils and poverty, but

from the fowls in his pumpkin patch. The story is not on record now, but I am sure it was once. The neglected so certain a method of bringing the proud low and reducing the irritable to speechless impotence as mustering hens, with or without a dog, and driving them through a gate into a coop. There is something missing after the sixth verse of the sixth chapter if Job produced his own eggs.

And it is unlikely, I think, that Job's hen-house was surrounded by trees. Mine is. Pines stand on the west side, macrocarpas on the south; wattles, plums, and a pussy-willow hide it from the east. If fowls know bitterness, mine spend their days gazing angrily at a paradise they are never allowed to enter. But yesterday they did enter it. I released them for a run and when I went to shut them in again they were all up trees. Two hours later they were still up trees, in spite of everything I had done to knock, poke and shoo them down. They were up trees when I went to bed. Six of them are there two nights later. From Sandy the rooster to the youngest and flightiest pullet they are now as completely bedevilled as Jordan's army. I suppose that is what we must expect when we listen to the news through open windows.

ONE of the natural history facts I keep forgetting is that young hares are born with their eyes open. This is because I never, as a boy, saw hares an hour or two old. But does it also mean that hares spend longer than

APRIL 22 rabbits in their mothers' wombs? When eggs take a long time to hatch the chickens are usually active and strong as soon as they emerge from the shell. Is the gestation of hares unusually slow? I don't know, because I have never had the opportunity to find out. It ought to be safer for leverets to be carried by their mothers while they are naked and blind than to be left under a tussock. But since safety in both cases means lying low, the more helpless the leveret is at birth the lower it should lie.

(To be continued)

## Nielsen's Flute Concerto

THE Flute Concerto by the Danish composer Carl Nielsen (1865-1931), to be played by James Hopkinson with the National Orchestra in a studio concert on Thursday, May 9, has more savage elements in it than one usually associates with the flute. Nielsen himself wrote that "the flute cannot belie its true nature. It is at home in Arcadia and prefers pastoral moods. A composer must therefore fit in with its gentle nature if he doesn't want to be branded as a barbarian."

But in this work there are brutal elements that to some extent belie the composer's statement. It was written late in his career, just after he had finished his bitter Sixth Symphony. Nielsen wrote it for the flautist Gilbert Jepsen, and it contains a kindly joke at the expense of his friend. The work



CARL NIELSEN  
(1865-1931)

is in two movements only, and the whole of the first movement is taken up with a restless search by the flute for the right key. To the consternation of the flute, the bass trombone joins in the search. During the movement several melodic resting places are found,

but the key eludes the instruments and the movement ends questioningly.

The point of the work is seen near the end of the second movement when the trombone clumsily alights on the right theme—a theme which has been heard in the first movement—but it plays it in the wrong key and it is only by sheer good luck that it manoeuvres itself into the right key of E major and plays the theme. The flute is outraged and emits pained but graceful phrases. After raucous glissandi from the trombone the movement ends in good spirits.

Nielsen's biographer Robert Simpson has described the work in this way: "The flute concerto is one of the most endearing of all Nielsen's works, and its humour is of the profoundest and most sympathetic kind. It represents a throwing off of his terrible fit of subjective gloom; although his health never recovered, his music never again showed signs of disintegration, even in the knotty and often angry clarinet concerto. . . . It must certainly be one of the most original concertos ever written for the flute."

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