## POINTS ABOUT HEDGEHOGS

HIS morning, when I was March, 1950. Hawks' eyes are, however, pursued by at least 50 sparrows. Apparently it did not see me until it was close enough to be startled, and as it swerved in fright it dropped something in the grass about a chain away that landed with an appreciable thud. I went on with

MARCH 24 my milking and heard the sparrows come back chattering into the branches above me; but when I searched the grass afterwards I found a partly-eaten very big rat. Hawks are often pursued by smaller birds, but I have never before seen one trying to snatch a rat away from them. Did they know it was a rat, or were they excited by the hawk only? Anthropomorphists might say that they were cheering the hawk on.

The curious thing is that I have not seen a living rat since I came to live here two years ago. There was a time, ten or twelve years back, when rats scampered over the ceiling every night; though even then I never saw them. But they disappeared. Whether they were killed by ferrets and cats or merely frightened away I don't know, but there has been neither sign nor sound of them since we re-occupied the cottage in

(continued from previous page) milk, and under its beneficent influence our tongues were loosed again.

"Bauxite, you say?"

"That's right. I've been plotting this particular field for some time. There's miles of it."

"I say! How far down is it?"

Deliberately he rose to his feet, produced the rod and put its nose on the scent. It wagged about excitedly, sniffing a moment, pointing downward, starting back to listen again like a thrush after a worm.

Calm, aloof, his domed and shining brow highlighted by the candle above the hollowed blackness of the cheekbones and the eyes, Fergus bent his intellect in placid comprehension to the messages conveyed to his finger-ends. At last he dismissed the rod once more to its sanctuary and wiped a little moisture from his brow.

"Just here the depth is between 23 and 24 feet," he pronounced in the dispassionate tone of a scientist dating the next ice age.

Between us we digested the significance of what we knew. We were silent, staring through the open window at the blown and knowledgeable night. Finally he rose to go, slipping the condensed milk into his coat pocket and shaking me by the hand. We were bonded thus against some vague immensity.

As he stood in the doorway he looked back once. I could not withhold a last question. "All that bauxite," I whispered, "It must be worth something?"

In that second his form was silhouetted black and colossal by the lamps of a truck swinging out behind the cook-house.

"Millions," he answered simply. Then he left me with a kind of valediction and faded on the blowing of the horn. | when she is asleep. If hedgehogs are as

milking Elsie under the pines, many times sharper than man's, and we a hawk flew in my direction have now perhaps had our warning.

> MY two roosters share my seven hens without much hostility or friction; and it is not merely a platonic partnership. Now that I have removed the six old hens-darkly and with some shame in the night-I have only pullets left, and they are laying and responsive to masculine advances. But the older rooster does not interfere with the younger one

if the hens make no MARCH 26 fuss over his attentions. If they run, get

hysterical and cry out, Sir Galahad rescues them with some violence. If they submit meekly, or ask for attention, as they occasionally do, he takes no action; unless, of course, the performance is too impudent, and is staged right under his nose. Even then, though he speedily ends it, there is no hostility afterwards. Have humans something to learn from hens-or something to fear? When we wish to be very offensive about men and women, to put them right outside the pale of prudence and decency, we say that they have the morals of the fowlyard. Should we say morals or manners?

THE hedgehog that we saw a few nights ago eating our tomatoes is at this moment eating our apples. We have been watching him for half-an-hour, and have now (10.16 a.m.) left him in a tangle of grass eating a fallen Jonathan. I don't think he is either blind or deaf, but he is curiously insensitive to our presence unless we touch him.

The question is, how MARCH 27 does he know a touch by a stick held in our hands from a touch by a dead

branch on the ground? He moves freely among thistles and stiff growths of grass, pushes under or climbs over sawn-off branches, and feels no uneasiness. But if I just touch him with one of those branches held in my hand he takes alarm. And it can't be merely his sense of smell, since he will go on eating when I am only a foot away if I stand quite still and don't touch him. I wonder, too, if his sense of smell is as acute as one would expect it to be in a creature who must feed himself by smell. I watched him a few minutes ago approaching a fallen quince, to me the strongest-smelling of all fruits, and he made several false moves when he was only two feet away. It is, of course, possible that he was following another scent blended with that of the quince, since he did not bite at the quince when he found it, but just sniffed it over and passed on to the fallen and buried Jonathan several yards away.

(Later: While I have been writing this note I have lost him, but I don't think he is far away. The Jonathan is threeparts eaten, and the grass under the quince trees high enough to hide him all day, I will put an egg beside the apple to see what happens to that. If he sucks it I shall have to begin watching Elsie to see that he does not rob her

by "SUNDOWNER"

safe among the cows as I am sure they are, how did the legend begin that they steal the milk?)

AFTER two months of drought we have had just enough rain to make us wish for more. I don't think it has gone deep enough to bring the worms to the surface for the blackbirds and magpies, and it has made no appreciable difference yet to the grass-except by soaking dead and woody stems and making them more palatable: a physical

but not yet a biolo-MARCH 30 gical change. The sheep have not come down to drink since the grass first got wet, and the cows have returned to the

dry face and top of the hill. But I am not hopeful that my young trees will revive. They held on bravely till about three weeks ago, when more than half of them seemed to die in forty-eight hours. The best drought-resisters have been wattles, and after them silver birch; but only five out of a dozen wattles are now alive, only three vigorously alive, and of the seven young birch trees I have hope now of only two. Seedlings have survived where they have not been disturbed, but germinated nuts and kernels, chestnuts, nectarines and plums-have proved as delicate as rooted plants where I have moved them from their first position. Thoreau's oak I have kept alive with the watering can, but that has been preferential treatment which I have not been able to extend to other cases. I resist the thought, but know in my heart that a year's work has been lost, and that my hope of seeing the birds nesting in trees which I have myself planted has receded dangerously.

(To be continued)



Dominion Museum photograph

"He is curiously insensitive to our presence unless we touch him"

## 1952 Subscription Concerts

AST year the National Orchestra initiated in Wellington an experiment in the method of making classical music more easily available to the public of New Zealand, and this year the Subscription Concerts scheme has been extended to Auckland and Christchurch. By the time the first Wellington subscription concert of the 1952 season was held last week (Saturday, April 19) the sales of season tickets had already shown that the "Subs" were not far behind the "Proms" in popularity rating. With only two seasons of these Concerts to judge by, the organisers of the venture in the Concert Section of the NZBS felt that the Wellington public had already given them good reason to believe that the season-ticket venture was a success. As time goes by, more and more people will no doubt come to accept subscription concerts as the normal procedure for concert-going. This year substantial concessions were offered-eight concerts for the price of

six-and contrary to what might have been expected, the top price ranges were in strongest demand. Indeed, the demand in general was in direct ratio to the price of seats, the order of popularity moving down from top to lowest

Of course, with a season ticket, and the prospect of holding the same seat for each of eight concerts instead of having to queue every time, concert attendance is made less exacting for the regular music lover. In reviewing the progress made in concert presentation, J. L. Hartstonge, NZBS Concert Manager, said that the subscription concerts in Wellington are proving their worth. The public there, he went on, are realising that "it is only by constant concert going that durable standards are formed, and the subscription or season ticket offers the most economical and satisfactory way of attending a season of symphony concerts."

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