

AUCKLAND BOTANICAL SOCIETY.

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In our previous News Letter we promised members an article by Mrs. Allen dealing with the Island of Sark. We are the more grateful to Mrs. Allen for remembering us, since her studies of Malayan botany must make heavy inroads on her time. Just how fruitful those studies have been may be judged by a quotation from the Flora of Malaya, Vol. 11 by R. E. Holttum. Professor Holttum is a most distinguished botanist and a world authority on ferns, particularly Malayan ferns of which he has made a life-long study and his Vol. 11 dealing with the fern flora constitutes a large book running into 643 pages. At the conclusion of his introduction he remarks, "The manuscript of this book has been critically studied by Mrs. B. E. G. Molesworth-Allen and I am indebted to her for the correction of various errors; also for additions to the known distribution of various species, based on her extensive field work during recent years."

Mrs. Allen visits Sark.

Last year when I was in the U.K. I spent some time in Sark and I was delighted to see that New Zealand shrubs predominated in the gardens. The British territory of the Channel Islands lie closer to the coast of France than to Britain, and they have much more of the continental climate. Sark, which can only be reached by sea, there being no air service, is the fourth largest island of the group. It is about 3 miles long by $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles at the widest part. When first approached there appear to be no trees and looked, I thought, awfully like some places in N.Z. where the forest has been destroyed and gorse and bracken take its place. However, after landing, I found a few little wooded valleys.

It is curious that there is not a proper village on the island; the houses being scattered about, sometimes two or three together, but for the most part, alone. The few shops are on the high part of the island, which is, I think, nearly 300 feet above the sea, and very windswept. Alongside the lanes here are a few old trees, but there are many gaps, for during the occupation they were cut by the Germans for fuel. The remainder do not seem to be very happy; and in fact nearly all the Scots Pines I saw were dying.

However, one of the healthiest and probably the most common shrub on the island was Shawia paniculata. It is used extensively for hedges and cuts well; also it does not appear to worry about the fierce winds at all. Next in popularity, to my surprise was Olearia ilicifolia, which, if not cut in hedges, grows to a small tree of about 20 feet or so. They had large leaves, but I saw no flowers. Rarer, was Griselinia littoralis, with leaves very yellow as I have seen them in exposed places on Mt. Egmont, and I should imagine, quite healthy. Hebes, of course, were everywhere, the predominant one having dark

green blunt leaves and stumpy flowers of deep purple. Hebes are used as windbreaks and for low hedges and seem to thrive in the icy winds (which I did not). I did notice, however, almost complete absence of Cabbage Trees and Flax. This is odd because they are extremely common in the other islands, the former being in nearly every garden in Jersey. I did find a few miserable plants of flax looking very windblown.

The most important house on the island is called the Seigneurie (and more of it anon). This lovely place has a walled garden and here were many New Zealand plants. Manuka, both pink and white was in flower, also two well-grown plants of the red. Senecio greyii (I think) was common and it was conspicuous even though it was not in flower, because of its gray foliage. It was here that I saw, in well sheltered places, a few Cabbage Trees, and one not so sheltered, had its leaves well shredded. Near the Cabbage Trees was an interesting Hebe, rather like H. speciosa in that the flowers were the same shape and colour, but the large leaves had long tapering points. There were several small plants of flax dotted about the garden, both variegated and plain. Recently dead, was a young Pohutukawa, about 5 feet high. Possibly killed by the snow which fell last winter, and which did kill off many tender plants. Perhaps had it been grown on one of the many cliff edges, it may have survived! I found a Pachystegia insignis in bud, and very healthy looking. I was surprised to see it and wondered who was interested enough in it to send it here.

All through this walled garden were excellent hedges of Shawia together with Feijoa and Acacia podylarifolia. Large patches of Rhododendron and Azaleas were coming to flower and although the spring was late, I think it had really started then in spite of the set backs of strong winds and cold weather.

The gales sweep the island is evident from the windswept trees and those whose new spring leaves had been burnt right back. I saw Horse Chestnut, Sycamore and many others completely blackened in this way, and Escallonia actually killed. However, this was unusual and although there were cold penetrating winds, the sun shone all the time I was there and spring had come! The Bluebells were out. They are particularly dark blue and looked at the edge of the tall gorse, like long blue shadows. On steep banks and path-sides were masses of primroses with Dog-violets dotted amongst them. More familiar were the fields of gorse, all in bloom, its scent heavy in the air. On the inhospitable rocks and tall cliffs by the sea was Broom. These plants, flattened to a few inches high by the wind, were just masses of yellow. Here also was the little Sea-Pink or Thrift (Armeria maritima) forming small soft cushions, and the flowers of that lovely muted pink.

Old fashioned box is used a great deal for garden borders, and kept cut very short it probably misses a great deal of the salt-laden winds. Sycamore, Common Elm and Ash seem to be the large trees which grow best here.

This lonely island had had, as to be expected, a tempestuous history. It is still one of the few places where feudal law still exists. The very early history is vague, but Druids were thought to have lived there. It was uninhabited for hundreds of years then pirates used the island as a base to menace shipping. It was taken by Britain from the French, after fierce battles, and again the pirates found it a convenient base and so it went on until 1565, when Queen Elizabeth granted the island to a feudal lord, one of the conditions being that he kept the

island inhabited by "forty able men and true", and this has been done ever since. As on the other inhabited islands there, the feudal lord was called the Seigneur. He was one Hilary de Carteret who was then the senior Seigneur on Jersey (and whose descendents, in fact, still have that title). About 150 years later the Seigneury was sold and has changed hands several times until 1852, when it was bought by forbears of the present "Dame de Sercq" (Dame Hathaway).

Sark has its own local government, but I think these days Guernsey, the nearest large island has a great deal of say. There is a curious French patois spoken, rather similar to the one on a small part of the Normandy coast. (In Guernsey and Jersey it is not done to speak French, and even the pronunciation of the gallic names, has in many cases been anglicised). In spite of the government the Dame still has many privileges, and thus the feudal laws are kept up. Only she may keep a dove-cote and bitch. There are many poor restless dogs but only one female. Had this extended to cats as well it may have done some good, for there are hundreds of semi-wild ones which roam about doing great damage to very interesting bird-life. No cars are allowed on the island, but there are post-war, diesel tractors which seem to do the general carrying, but the usual form of transport is still the incredibly ancient horse-drawn carriages. There are two types, Victorias and Waggonettes; I am told this is what they are for the style was before my time!

It is a lovely little island, and one feels if the people were energetic enough (which they are not) trees could be grown to from wind-breaks, as has been done so successfully in the Scillies with certain species of *Pinus* and with *Pittosporum crassifolium*, thus protecting their homes and land.

News from Waipoua.

The highlight of the Waipoua trip, at any rate botanically speaking, was the discovery of a strange orchid. It has been forwarded to Mr. E. Hatch and he has kindly sent us a note on it, to which he has been good enough to attach a very clear line drawing which should be of great assistance to all seeking further specimens of this interesting find. Mr. Hatch also includes a note on the naming of the saprophytic species of *Corybas*.

ORCHID NOTES.

Edwin D. Hatch.

Miss Elizabeth Kulka recently passed on to me an orchid specimen collected last January while the Bot. Soc. were at Waipoua. This plant interested me immensely since it obviously did not belong to any of the 22 orchid genera so far recorded from New Zealand. I sent to Australia in the hope that it might find relatives among the 80-odd genera there, but without success. The flower is rather small, and extremely difficult to decipher in the dried state, so that living material, particularly of the column and labellum, will be necessary before we can determine this plant. It is almost certainly an undescribed species, possibly even a new genus. I hope to get up to Waipoua next summer, but should any member stumble on this orchid in the meantime, I shall be grateful for fresh specimens, alive or in pickle. Miss Kulka describes it as