

IS A PEST TO FARMERS.

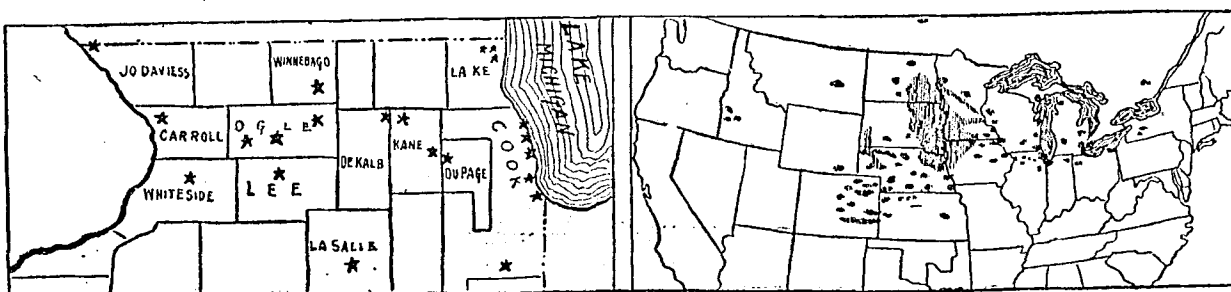
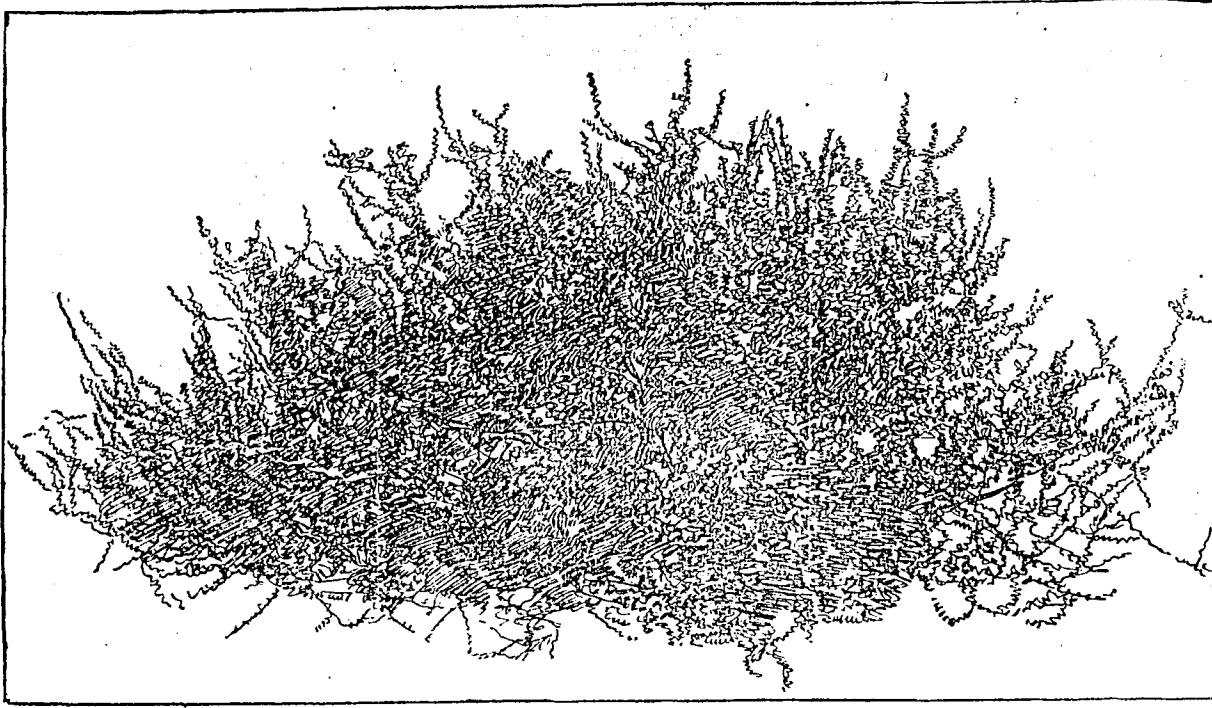
**CHICAGO COUNCIL MAY HAVE TO PASS
 A "TUMBLEWEED ORDINANCE."**

City Is Full of the Russian Plant That Is So Dangerous to the Agricultural Interests of the Surrounding Country—Brought Here from South Dakota in Stock Cars—Nature of the Weed and Its Great Powers of Reproduction.

Russian tumbleweeds in Chicago are a source of much fear and annoyance to the farmers of Illinois and neighboring States, and it is probable the City Council may be asked in the near future to take energetic measures for their eradication. This is the weed commonly known as the Russian this-

out in a low, circular form, but when confined grows up tall and compact. It has no leaves, properly speaking, as the offshoots from the branches are nothing but needle-shaped bodies two inches long by 1-25 of an inch in diameter, and armed with a spiny tip which, when hardened with age, makes the tumbleweed a disagreeable thing for men or beasts to encounter. When the plant is young these spines are tender and succulent and sheep eat them greedily, particularly if other fodder is scarce. This has caused a lively discussion in the Northwest, where the sheep herders see in the spread of the tumbleweed a chance to drive out the farmers and secure a big free range. Before the advent of this Russian weed cultivation of the soil and division of the land into small holdings by actual farmers was killing off the range industry. Now that tumbleweed is taking root on the vast prairies faster than the farmers can subdue it the conditions are reversed and the sheep raisers are moving in again.

Damage Is Enormous.
 Experts assert that the tumbleweed has



RUSSIAN TUMBLEWEED AND INFECTED DISTRICTS.

tle and Russian cactus, both of which, according to the experts, are misnomers, as it has none of the distinguishing characteristics of either family. Scientists call it the *salsola kali tragus*, but for all practical purposes the more popular name of "tumbleweed" will answer. It is a pest of terrible proportions, and intelligent tillers of the soil view with alarm its unrestricted growth in Chicago. This at first might seem to be a needless scare, but a study of the conditions under which the plant thrives will tend to increase the desire for its speedy extinction.

The Russian tumbleweed was first brought to America by a colony of Mennonites who came from Russia in 1873 and settled at Scotland, Bonhomme County, S. D., the seeds being imported in the hay and straw used in packing the household effects of the immigrants. If this infected material had been burned when the goods were unpacked in Dakota and similar measures followed with each succeeding detachment of arrivals it is probable the weed might never have gained a foothold in this country. But the Mennonites are a thrifty and saving lot of people, and instead of burning the hay and straw in which their goods were transported they fed it to their stock and used it for bedding. The next year the tumbleweed made its appearance as a plant in Dakota, and thriving in the hot, dry summers of that section of the country, it spread rapidly year by year until now it has invaded seventeen States and is common in Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec, and other parts of the Canadas. As early as 1883 the pest was found on the lake shore near Evanston, but it did not attract much attention until 1894, as the identity of the plant was not well established and Illinois agriculturists did not then know its capacity for mischief. In 1890 reports of the damage done by the weed in the Dakotas having been received there was some apprehension here when E. J. Hill discovered a big patch of it near the ice house at Wolf Lake, in the southern district of the city, but it remained for Prof. L. H. Pammel to sound an alarm in 1894, when it was ascertained the plant was spreading through the State.

How It Got to Chicago.

Men who have investigated the matter say the tumbleweed came to Chicago from Dakota in stock cars. By this they mean the hay put in the cars for the feeding of cattle in transit was infected with the seeds of the plant and these seeds remained in the droppings to take root and flourish in Chicago soil when the cars were cleaned out here after the cattle were unloaded. Once rooted and left undisturbed its spread was rapid. The tumbleweed is a peculiar annual. It grows fast and matures early in September, after which it seems to die off, but the seeds retain vitality, as when freezing weather comes the plant breaks off close to the ground and goes tumbling about wherever the winds blow it, scattering the seed over a wide area of territory to take root and spring up the following summer. As some of these plants attain enormous size and contain millions of seeds it takes but a comparatively short time for the pest to get a foothold from which only the united efforts of the afflicted community can dislodge it. When the tumbleweed appears in a district the people must band together for its extinction, as individual labor is of small account. In Dakota there are State boards whose duty it is to wage relentless war against the weed and to see that landowners, railway companies, and County Commissioners use diligent effort to extirpate it, failing in which they are liable to serious penalties. An interesting feature of this law is that the man who neglects to clean his land of the pest on being notified by a neighbor is held responsible for all money damages which result from its spreading to the neighbor's premises.

Eradication of the tumbleweed is easy when undertaken at the proper time and by the concerted action of a community. It dies fast when cut or pulled in August or at any time before the seeds mature. After Sept. 1, when the seeds are ripe, the only means of destruction is by fire. Then the weeds should be cut or pulled, stacked in big heaps, and fired before the seed pods are dry enough to break open and spread their contents. Two or three years of energetic action of this sort will effectually rid any given locality of the pest, provided proper safeguards are taken against its reintroduction in the shape of the total destruction of all refuse from stock cars and a united refusal to buy grain or grass seed that does not come from localities known to be free from the weed. In January, 1894, C. B. Shedd of the Knickerbocker Ice company made an effort to kill out the tumbleweed from the vicinity of the Wolf Lake ice-houses, and he kept a force of men busy for some time collecting and burning the plants, which were then tumbling about the prairie, some of the piles to which the torch was applied being as large as a small dwelling house, but in the following December the place was still infected with the pest, and from there it had spread to many farms in Northern Indiana, being especially thick along the railway tracks from Colehour south and east. As the soil of Wolf Lake is not supposed to be favorable to the propagation of the weed, which thrives best on warm, dry land, some idea of its vitality may be obtained from Mr. Shedd's failure to burn it out.

Grows to Large Size.

Tumbleweeds have been cut in Chicago which were fully six feet across and stood three feet from the ground. One of the largest specimens ever found here was taken from the lake shore near the North Side pumping works last fall, and measured a trifle more than six feet across the top. The plant has no regular, definite shape. When growing free in unrestricted space it spreads

already caused more damage in the United States than all the other weed pests with which our farmers have had to contend, including the much-advertised Canada thistle. Certain it is no other weed has been the subject of such general fear, and even the Federal Government has been appealed to for relief. State discussion is common, and last winter the representatives of several States met in conference at St. Paul to arrange for concerted action in fighting the pest. The mere robbing of the soil of its nourishment is not the worst thing alleged against the tumbleweed. It possesses in a marked degree the power of crowding out other plants, particularly those growing on cultivated lands, and the spines on matured specimens make the harvesting of such crops as hay and small grains almost impossible. In many sections of the Dakotas vast tracts of land have been abandoned by the owners because it is so covered with the weeds that the operation of machinery is attended with almost insurmountable difficulties. Besides all this the rolling about of huge masses of the dry weeds offers an easy means of spreading disastrous fires. No actual figures of the money loss caused by this unwelcome visitor are available later than those given by J. H. Dewey of the Division of Botany at Washington, who estimates the loss in 1892 at more than \$2,000,000, and since then there has been an enormous increase each year. In Dakota alone the money loss in 1893 was over \$1,000,000, fully 20 per cent of the crop capacity of the land in the infected counties being cut off.

In Illinois the weed nuisance is receiving careful consideration by the university experiment stations at Champaign and Urbana. From bulletins published by the officials at these stations it appears the tumbleweed has obtained a foothold in thirteen counties in this State, the worst point being Chicago, where it is found in over a dozen different localities, principally near railway sidings. Owing to the favorable conditions in Illinois it is hoped the weed, with timely and concerted action, may be eradicated before its spread becomes general. Winds are not so fierce here as in the Dakotas, and the closer cultivation of the soil tends somewhat to hold the pest in check, but even with this there must be a relentless war of extermination waged.