

Baldness of South Australia

REAL CAUSE OF RECENT FLOODS

Spasmodic Stream Flow Explained

STRIKING LESSONS FROM ABROAD

Why are certain parts of South Australia this winter subject to a succession of floods?

It is not that there is a great deal of rain, for this winter's rainfall, though heavy for this State, is light in comparison with the precipitation that takes place in other countries without causing floods.

Floods are caused really by territorial baldness. In its natural state land is covered with trees, shrubs, grasses, and a spongy substance known as humus. This hair of the land, so to speak, regulates the flow of water and prevents floods; but when heavy rain falls on an area that has no natural sponge the waters rush unimpeded to the nearest streams in such volumes as to overflow the banks and cause floods.

Undoubtedly South Australia is almost bald.

Baldness in a man means little but detriment to beauty, the inconvenience of having to carry about a playground for flies, and the exasperation of being a constant cause for jocularities. It has the slight advantage of relief from the worries and exactions of haircutting.

But baldness in a country is a serious thing. It is very serious when the country relies on agriculture for its prosperity.

In a man baldness means destitution of hair; in a country it means lack of

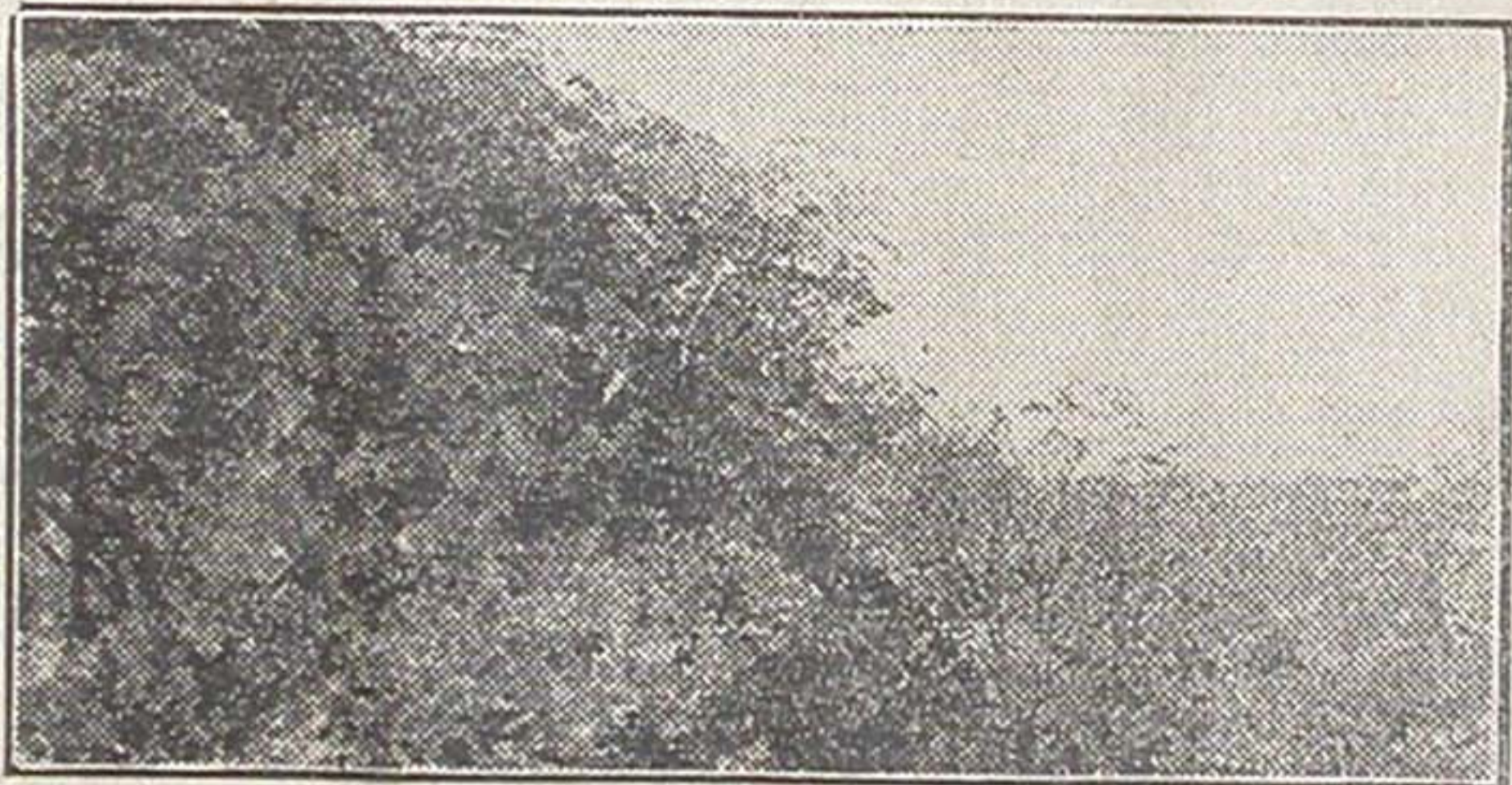
were available in profusion; but the trees had to be cleared away before homes could be built and land could be cultivated. Trees were destroyed wholesale by fire and tediously by ring-barking.

The settlers derided Australian timbers. They saw little value in them. Oak and walnut, ash, red pine, and deal, the chief commercial timbers of the other side of the world, were not in Australia, and with the lack of adaptability, the early settlers assumed that what was not oak or walnut, ash, red pine, or deal was merely rubbish. So they hacked and sawed and burned without compunction until the tree-clad areas began to shrink.

Narrowmindedness and profligacy 50 to 100 years ago are yielding now wastes of baldness. Never extravagantly wooded, South Australia now has lost much of the natural protective covering of trees it had. Commercial timber has almost entirely disappeared from South Australia, and even firewood has become scarce and dear.

More than that, the country, deprived of the natural covering that serves as

NATURE'S COVERING



PROTECTS THE SOIL

vegetation, trees in particular, and the consequential loss of fertility. It also means proneness to floods.

South Australia was never well wooded. Now it is one of the most sparsely timbered countries of any size in the world, desert areas alone extended.

Settlers in the early days of Australia learned to hate the trees. They were a hindrance rather than an asset. Firewood, fencing, and building material

a sponge and a collector and container of the humus of the soil, is becoming hard and rutted with ravines, the land is losing much of the benefit of the light rainfall, and the climate is becoming worse.

This is not a fanciful picture. It is a close-up view, so close up as to be rather blurred of the start of South Australia on a downward course into the condition that has ruined some of the older countries of the world.