

Larch Canker Loose in New England

Forestry

America's dwindling timber supply is threatened by a new tree disease, similar to chestnut blight, which is capable of wiping out stands valued at approximately \$3,150,000,000, says Dr. Haven Metcalf, in charge of the Office of Forest Pathology, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Larch canker, as the disease is called, has been known in Europe for about a century and is believed to have been brought here on seedlings from Great Britain, prior to enactment of the plant quarantine law. It was recently discovered attacking trees in two New England states.

Dr. Metcalf characterizes the disease as "far and away the most potentially serious tree disease that has ever struck the United States." Its danger, he explains, lies not in the fact that it is attacking and killing the native larch, or tamarack, a tree not commercially important, but that it has proved contagious to the Douglas fir and the yellow pine, the

two most important timber species in North America.

Drastic measures will be necessary to stamp out the disease before it gets beyond control and, in Dr. Metcalf's opinion, it may be too late now. Three thousand diseased trees in Massachusetts and Rhode Island will be burned out this summer. It is not known whether other areas have been affected, but larch canker is equipped to spread rapidly.

Fear is expressed that the great Douglas fir forests of the West may become infected because the larch forest, ranging in a continuous broad belt from New England to the Pacific coast, interlaces with the fir forest near British Columbia, forming a bridge upon which the disease could cross. Little is known about the disease, but imported diseases and imported pests, it is stated, are frequently far more virulent in countries they adopt than in their native habitat.

Science News-Letter, August 4, 1928

Missionaries Suffer from "Nerves"

Psychiatry

A large amount of mental and nervous illness among missionaries in the far east is reported by Dr. J. L. McCartney, psychiatrist, who has just returned from three years' study of conditions in Chinese cities.

"Out of 203 missionaries in one single mission invalidated back to the home land from China, 25 per cent. were sent back to America because of 'neurasthenia,'" Dr. McCartney states in *Mental Hygiene*.

About eight per cent. more were suffering from "insanity," and almost three per cent. from other neurotic ailments. Thus, out of all the cases of serious illness in this mission group, 36 per cent. were suffering from mental and nervous conditions.

"These figures may be taken as representative of all missionary groups in the Orient, and what is true of the far east may also be considered true of other mission fields, such as Africa and the near east," Dr. McCartney adds.

Tracing the reasons for the situation, he points out that most of the mission workers volunteer during the impressionable period of adolescence. To an unstable personality the mission field seems mysterious, and offers a career of romantic martyrdom.

If these cases are not weeded out before they are sent away from

home and put under the strain of a foreign environment, they are very likely to be swamped in their attempts to adjust themselves, he states. The capacity to withstand the foreign environment is important, considering that failure to adjust means wasted ability, and also that the hundreds of dollars spent in sending out such an unstable individual might just as well have been thrown away.

The unstable person develops nerves from the strange foreign customs. Oriental business methods irritate the westerner by their slowness. He finds that the natives consider the foreigner a never ending source of interest, and this feeling that he is living in the public eye is apt to prove a strain. The young American missionary often shoulders a colossal amount of responsibility, since he becomes a court of final appeal in all sorts of native troubles. In addition, the oriental system of sexual and personal ethics puzzles the American and may throw him into a morbid mental condition.

Dr. McCartney points out that "appeals for mission volunteers given to children at too early an age, before their personalities have unfolded sufficiently, not only defeat their noble purpose, but are actually dangerous."

Science News-Letter, August 4, 1928

NATURE RAMBLINGS

By FRANK THONE

Natural History



Screech-Owl

The Englishman sat suddenly bolt upright. "My word!" he gasped, "What was that?"

"It's an owl," answered the guide.

"Yes, I know jolly well it was an 'owl,'" returned the Briton; "But what in 'eaven's name was 'owlin'?"

The screech-owl is like that—fit to make the short hairs jump right off the back of your neck. Though it is one of the smallest of the owls, it has one of the most potent of owl voices, and unlike its usually silent brethren is given to vocal exercises for long stretches—half the night on end, it often seems to exasperated would-be sleepers.

Why it was ever christened the screech-owl, though, must remain a mystery. It doesn't screech. There really isn't a proper English word for its quavering, shivering, mournful ululation. A sort of prolonged, half-sobbing bleat, is about the best characterization one can think of, and that doesn't do the sound justice. Dante didn't know the screech-owl. If he had known it, he would have had a row of them perched on the sign-board that directed incoming traffic to check all hope at this point.

Just about now it is becoming unpleasant to go a-walking in the neighborhood of a tree where a screech-owl family has been growing up. The youngsters are coming out and making their first efforts at flight, and their jealous parents will swoop down at unwitting intruders and "blip them on the head." And for all its small size, the screech-owl swings a wicked wing when it comes to blipping.

Science News-Letter, August 4, 1928

The National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics has defined about 560 words used in aviation in order to standardize their use.