FORESTRY

NATURE RAMBLINGS by Frank Thone

Shelterbelts

SHELTERBELT planting on the Plains has gone on apace during the past season; the real test of this much-discussed project is on.

At this appropriate juncture a Russian forester speaks, a veteran of the first shelterbelt plantings on the steppes, made long before the War, who has lived to see the outcome of the experiments he helped to launch. He is Prof. G. N. Vyssotsky, of the Kharkov forest experiment station, and his observations have been translated out of the Russian for the Society of American Foresters by Oleg Maslenikov and M. Dobrotin, of Berkeley, Calif.

The notion of radically modifying dryland climates by planting large masses of trees is definitely rejected by the veteran Russian forester. Although he himself first advanced the doctrine of forests "forwarding" rains in humid regions, by the more rapid evaporation taking place from their foliage, he disciaims it applicability to arid regions. If anything, forests there would have an opposite effect, he says; and at least in regions where the soil is porous afforestation tends to reduce stream flow.

Furthermore, he adds, "I came to the conclusion that a forest growing under such handicaps is not healthy; it degenerates eventually and becomes a breeding ground for countless parasites. . . In the U.S.S.R. we have given up planting forests in large bodies in the steppe regions."

Shelterbelt planting is a different matter, Prof. Vyssotsky emphasizes. Shelterbelts are regularly established features of the steppe land-use program.

"In general there is no doubt as to the beneficial effects of shelterbelts," he says. "Their snow-collecting capacity is of great importance to roads, farmsteads and settlements; they serve as protection from snowdrifts, blowing sand, and to some extent from dust as well as from strong winds. Likewise in some cases they can be used as a protection for cultivated areas; also for encircling ravines, so as to protect the plantations along the steeper slopes and keep the snow from being blown down into the valley."

It is as snow fences that shelterbelts seem to have served their most useful end, in Prof. Vyssotsky's opinion. They build high snowbanks among the trees themselves, thus encouraging the trees' own growth. And in the intervals between shelterbelts they make for a deeper and more uniform snow blanket over the fields—something much to be desired in windswept regions such as the steppes of eastern Europe and the plains of western America.

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PUBLIC HEALTH

Victory Over Two Plagues Is Reported From Sweden

A MAJOR triumph in disease fighting in Sweden, reported at the meeting of the American Public Health Association, has fired the enthusiasm of American health officers engaged in what seems like a hopeless fight against the same diseases.

Discovery of an absolutely sure way to prevent infantile paralysis would mean less to the health of this country than repetition of the Swedish achievement, Dr. Thomas Parran, New York State Health Commissioner, declared.

The triumph, reported by Dr. Einar Rietz, health commissioner of Stockholm, is the practical eradication in Sweden of the two venereal diseases, syphilis and gonorrhea. American health officers trying to accomplish the same results here must fight not only the disease but an antagonistic public opinion which largely forbids even the mention of the diseases by name. Yet these unmentionable plagues are the cause of more suffering and disability than any other communicable disease.

The point is that syphilis and gonorrhea are diseases as are typhoid fever, tuberculosis and yellow fever. They may be brought under control and practically wiped out by much the same methods that have eradicated yellow fever from this country and have brought so many other former plagues under control.

Using the familiar and trusty weapons of all disease fighting, the number of new cases of syphilis in Sweden has been reduced from six thousand a year to four hundred and thirty-one, Dr. Rietz reported. The population of Sweden is about the same as that of New York, outside of New York City. Best estimates of the number of new cases in New York State every year reach eleven thousand.

One feature of the Swedish method of handling the disease is provision of free medical and hospital care and medicine to any patient who has syphilis in the infectious stage. All patients must take treatment. Those who do not are subject to various penalties, including hard labor. Yet Dr. Rietz assured his American colleagues that personal liberty is safeguarded as carefully in Sweden as in the United States. Cases are reported to the health department without the patient's name. Sources of infection must be reported just as in the case of typhoid fever or any other communicable disease. Cases of syphilis are now so rare in Sweden that professors have difficulty in finding material to use in teaching medical students.

Encouraged by the Swedish experience, American health workers are hoping they will be given the opportunity to repeat the triumph over these two plagues in this country.

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The air conditioning system of the British steamship Queen Mary will be so arranged that passengers can personally control the temperature of staterooms.