ECOLOGY

NATURE RAMBLINGS
by Frank Thone

The Worth of Weeds

PLANT weeds. This seemingly heretical suggestion is offered by Prof. Paul B. Sears, botanist of the University of Oklahoma, as possible answer to the challenge of plow-ripped, drought-scourged, wind-drifted lands in the West. Once rich grazing lands, they were broken for wheat and then ruined by drought and winds, so that now they are temporary deserts, good for neither grass nor grain.

Plant weeds, says Prof. Sears, and he points out why:

"It is vital that some cover, no matter what, be developed here without delay. Nature has furnished a hint. Throughout this region after the drought was well begun the despised Russian thistle did so well that it was often the only plant available for stock feed.

"Instead of seeding the area with costly grass seed, whose success is a gamble, it might be sensible to mix in a good proportion of weed seeds. If the land is abandoned, weeds will be the first cover anyhow, and as we have seen, they are a transient affair at best, preparing the way for better kinds of plants."

Lest we should think Prof. Sears' proposal too daring, he hastens to offer a precedent—always a consoling thought to the conservatism ingrained even in pioneers and experimenters:

"Actually the method is not new. There is a brilliant example of its use on the bare clay slopes of the huge Ohio Conservancy dams north of Dayton, which today are held in perfect condition by a dense, well developed sod.

"The success of this plant cover was insured from the start by the deliberate use of the cheapest, weediest mixtures of grass and clover seed that could be obtained. The weeds took hold at once, but their more genteel companions are now in full possession, just as the coonskin cap and leather jacket have been replaced by the fedora and business suit in the one-time wilderness beyond the Alleghenies."

Looked at from one viewpoint, foresters have been practicing Prof. Sears' doctrine of weed cultivation for some time now. In the flush days of American lumbering, only such tree aristocrats as white pine, long-leaf pine, white oak and hard maple were considered really worth the cutting. Species like poplar, jack pine and black locust were looked upon as of small account. But because they will grow fast, and can live on the cut-over, burnt-over deserts of man's making, foresters now actually make extensive plantings of these once-despised "wooden weeds."

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PSYCHIATRY

Psychiatrist Cures Paralysis In Almost Miraculous Fashion

THOSE miraculous cures by which healers, saints and shrines build up their reputations are paralleled by six almost instantaneous cures of hysterical paralysis reported by Dr. Abraham Myerson of Boston State Hospital. (*Journal, American Medical Association,* Nov. 16.)

In curing these helpless persons, Dr. Myerson used either the electric current, to "recall" the helpless part into consciousness, or anesthesia. With both treatments went encouragement, instruction, and what the doctor himself calls "legitimate hocus-pocus" or trickery.

Two of the six patients were football players injured on the field. One had received an injury to his spinal cord which set up a numbness of the legs and weakness, the physician explains. The numbness later disappeared but a state of fear set in and the young man could not walk. Having satisfied himself after numerous examinations that this was the case, the physician explained the situation to the young man and told him he would be able to walk out of the office that same day. A powerful electric current was given to the muscles of the front of the leg. They contracted violently. The football player was then told to try to help the electric current and contract the muscles with each stimulation. In a short time the doctor shut the current off. The patient, not knowing this, kept on moving his leg. Convinced then that all was well, he walked out without difficulty.

Another case was that of a well-known university professor. He developed a neurosis associated with difficulty in swallowing. The trouble finally reached the point where the professor could swallow no food, and only with difficulty could he swallow liquids. Dr. Myerson gave the learned man two treatments. He was first told that next day he would be given a mild anesthetic and that when he recovered consciousness he would be able to swallow liquids.

Next day the professor was given nitrous oxide. As he became unconscious, a glass of milk was put to his mouth. When he began to regain consciousness, he was sharply ordered to drink. He drank freely without difficulty. Three days later the experiment was repeated, except that he was assured that he would waken and find himself eating solid food. Accordingly a sandwich was handed him and he began to eat.

The patient's visit ended by the doctor and his assistant and the patient going out to a restaurant where they all ordered a hearty meal. The professor ate with as much readiness as the others. In this as well as the other five cases reported, there was no recurrence.

"The cases are undoubtedly of the kind that make up the roster of miracles," Dr. Myerson concludes. "They are recorded to show that the disease condition disappears when the symptoms are explained physiologically and the treatment is rationally directed."

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