PLANT PATHOLOGY

NATURE RAMBLINGS by Frank Thone

War Among the Elms

ELMS are putting forth their young leaves through all the land where winter has given place to spring. Through all the land, people who love elms are renewing their anxiety over the menace of the invading fungus enemy, beetle-borne, called (most unjustly to Holland!) the Dutch elm disease.

In New England especially, famous for its elm-arched towns, eyes of concern are turned toward the 45-mile area around New York, which is as yet the only firm foothold the invader has succeeded in gaining on this continent. Prof. J. H. Faull of the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University speaks a timely word in favor of vigorous and unstinted effort toward total eradication of the plague, and against half-way "control" measures which have been proposed in some quarters because full eradication is such an expensive business.

The cost of elm disease eradication undoubtedly is high, because it involves the cutting down of diseased trees as fast as they are found, and burning them to the last twig. Only thus can the supply of fungus be taken away from the beetle bearers. But Prof. Faull, who is no more reckless about the expenditure of public funds than other New Englanders, offers telling argument in support of the idea of ultimate economy by spending now:

"That matter must be faced regardless of what is done about our elms, whether we try to save them or leave them to their fate. It may readily be admitted that considerable cost will be incurred in carrying through the eradication project because it will take several years to bring it to completion. But costs are sure to be *many, many* times greater if we do not eradicate the Dutch elm disease.

"To my mind there is no alternative. So-called 'control', short of eradication, may defer the loss of our elms; but the conclusion in Holland, where essentially such a measure is being practiced, is that the elms will eventually go.

"Actually such 'control' may be more costly in the aggregate than doing nothing at all. If our elms be allowed to die there will be unavoidable costs of removal and these will be huge because of the vast number of trees involved. Then there will be costs of replacements, losses of property values, and the sad loss of the American elm for planting—a tree for which there is no equivalent."

Science News Letter, April 25, 1936

PSYCHOLOGY

Best Books and Best Sellers Written by Young Authors

BEST sellers are most frequently written by young writers between 40 and 44 years old, Dr. Harvey C. Lehman, of Ohio University, told the psychology section of the Ohio Academy of Sciences.

When Dr. Lehman speaks of best sellers, he does not mean those works that flare into popularity for a period only to fade out like a rocket or a hit-of-the-week song. He means those books that have sold in enormous quantities over a long period of time. "In His Steps," for example, published in 1896 by a Kansas minister, Charles M. Sheldon, is said to have sold more than 20,000,000 copies. And it is estimated that 50,000,000 copies of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" have been sold.

"Such best sellers are books that make a very strong appeal to humanity in general," Dr. Lehman said. "In many instances they are books which appeal strongly to children and to semi-literates."

Books judged by critics to be among the world's best are also most likely to be written by authors between 40 and 44, Dr. Lehman found.

Women writers are likely to publish their greatest works at a somewhat earlier age. Their peak is reached between 35 and 39.

This does not mean that beyond that age, authors lose their ability to do creative writing. Good books are often written by writers of advanced age. Goethe was over 80 when he published the second part of the great "Faust." But such occurrences are the exception rather than the rule.

"Best books have, of course, been published by authors of almost every chronological age level beyond early youth," Dr. Lehman said. "Literary masterpieces of the first rank have been published most frequently, however, by men who were not beyond their forties. The age curves suggest that it would be highly absurd to attempt to establish a deadline.

"Do the decrements at the older age levels imply a corresponding decrement in the ability to write creatively? Certainly not.

"It seems obvious that outstanding potential ability must be present in the individual who produces literary masterpieces. However, potential ability alone does not guarantee accomplishment."

"At the older chronological age levels, some one or more of the numerous variables that are essential to the fruition of literary genius tend either to wane or to disappear.

"At the present time psychology is unable to identify all of the factors that enable a particular individual to exhibit literary genius. Therefore, in instances where the fruits of genius fail to appear, it is not possible to ascertain which of the several essential ingredients are wanting."

Science News Letter, April 25, 1936

By the Director of the
FELS PLANETARIUM

STARS *and* TELESCOPES

By JAMES STOKLEY

A complete summary for the amateur, this book gives an outline history of astronomy, describes star movements, tells where to look and what to see, shows how planetaria work, and explains the nebular theories of Eddington, Jeans, etc. "Up-to-date, comprehensive, clear." —*Harlow Shapley*, Harvard Observatory. Fully illustrated. $3.00.

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