



Have We Learned?

➤ EXPERIENCE is proverbially the best teacher; although, it has been wryly added, a dear one. The discouraging thing is that so many of us, having taken a course in her costly though by no means exclusive school, insist on re-matriculating and immediately putting on the dunce-cap.

A new edition of Prof. Paul Sears' conservation classic, *Deserts on the March*, has just appeared. It tells again the too-familiar story of reckless and ruinous cropping methods, of soil exhaustion and erosion, of draught and dust-storms. Many of the chapters are unchanged; but they had no need for change, any more than chapters in Jeremiah or Ezekiel. The price of disobedience to the Law that sustains the world remains the same: famine, and pestilence, and desolation in the high places.

But Prof. Sears adds a new final chapter of tempered optimism, in which he dwells upon advances made in the practice of erosion control, and especially on the hard-learned willingness of farm communities to plan and plow together instead of on the destructive and often outright suicidal *laissez-faire* pattern

traditional in American agriculture. It looks quite encouraging.

However, there have again been disquieting reports from the Plains, where fleetingly favorable weather and high grain prices put an occasional premium on boom wheat farming. Big speculative operators are said to be ripping up grass-held land by tens of thousands of acres, planning to rake in the money as fast as they can while good seasons last and then to clear out, leaving the permanent farmers to reap the dust-laden whirlwind.

They almost got caught last year. At the end of his penultimate chapter, Prof. Sears writes: "Dust storms obscuring the sun for days at a time were raging when

the author began writing *Deserts on the March*; today . . . rain is falling and has been falling in the greatest quantity since the weather records began, swelling rivers into murky torrents laden with rich farm soil." That passage could not have been written later than June of 1947; for a few weeks after those ruinous rains ceased an equally ruinous drought set in. Wheat got by, but corn was caught disastrously short. And during the past fall and winter the return of the dust storms was averted by only the thinnest margin of timely snow.

Have we as a people yet learned? The coming summer may give us our answer.

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PUBLIC HEALTH

Recruiting for Health

War-time volunteer workers may be asked to put National Health Assembly recommendations into effect in home-town war on disease.

➤ THE millions of women from every hamlet and city of the nation who volunteered their services to the Red Cross and similar organizations during World War II are going to be asked to serve in another war.

This time the women and the men who worked beside them will be fighting disease and needless death and crippling in their home towns. If a hospital or a diagnostic clinic is needed in the community, if the county is without a full-time health officer, if the school needs a health program, these are the women and men to get it.

Because he is convinced of the power and ability of the war-time volunteer workers, Oscar V. Ewing, Federal Security Administrator, hopes to arouse their enthusiasm to carry out recommendations of the National Health Assembly to be held in Washington May 1-4.

What the Assembly will recommend is not precisely known. It is being called as a result of a message of President Truman requesting Mr. Ewing to develop "feasible national health goals for the next 10 years."

The controversial problem of national health insurance may be discussed. But Mr. Ewing and medical leaders agree that pending settlement of that controversy there are many other non-controversial health problems that need to be attacked at once.

More doctors and dentists, medical and dental research scientists, nurses and technicians are perhaps the biggest health need of the nation at present. Greatest obstacle to improving health, either by discovery of new remedies for disease or by applying those already known, is the bottleneck in personnel.

A bill for Federal subsidy for medical education is now being prepared, Mr. Ewing said, in the hope of overcoming this bottleneck to improved national health.

Many health needs, however, are local and can best be met when the people of the locality are aroused to the need.

One problem which Mr. Ewing hopes can be solved by the National Health Assembly is the matter of the many overlapping voluntary health agencies. Often, he pointed out, such an agency has been so good that it achieved its aim. But instead of then dissolving when its mission is accomplished, it "keeps going like the bureaucrats," he said. The problem is to fit these agencies into the local health situation as it changes. Men and women in the community, he believes, can help with this.

Organizing health activities of an area on an area or regional basis, regardless of governmental organization such as townships, counties or towns, is one big thing which must, in Mr. Ewing's opinion, be done.

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