

BOOK REVIEWS

USDA Manager of American Agriculture. By Ferdie Deering. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1945. Pp. xvi, 213. Illustrations, Tables and Charts, Appendix. \$2.50.)

Mr. Deering has been long in the newspaper business world. He has been for ten years and is now the editor of the important farm paper *The Oklahoma Farmer Stockman*.

The author's announced purpose in writing this book is to influence a complete and drastic reorganization of the Department of Agriculture. Very few of any of the functions and services now supplied and performed by its various Bureaus and Divisions are recommended to be discontinued. His pet peeve, stated and repeated again and again with the monotony of dripping water, is what is called unnecessary duplication, overlapping authority, divided responsibility and consequent inefficiency. The treatment of the material used more nearly supports the predicate of mismanagement of American agriculture by the Department since 1932 arising out of and on account of inept organization and the following of practices of doubtful value.

The author does not charge the United States Department of Agriculture with the exercise of the power of management by directive land use regulations. He supports his dictum by pointing out a certain indirect approach made by the Department in its attempts to regulate the production of basic crops and products by penalties, bounties, parity payments and subsidies, plus payment for specified land use practices. Viewed from this standpoint the author makes out a good case. The book is a first class statistical report, including the historical background of the Department of Agriculture.

The vein of discussion is indicated sharply by the chapter titles, namely: (1) When to Sow and When to Reap; (2) Streamlined Duplication; (3) He Who Holds the Pocketbook; (4) The Needle and the Haystack; (5) The Number One Problem; (6) Famine of Plenty; (7) Uncle Sam, the Farmers' Banker; (8) Scientific Policemen; (9) Special Services for Particular Needs; (10) Education and Information; (11) The New USDA; (12) Tomorrow's Agriculture.

Chapter Five, "The Number One Problem," deals with the subject of soil conservation. The crying physical facts of devastation by erosion points up the picture threatening the continuation of America as a great agricultural nation. If our civilization declines and falls on account of erosion it will result from the fallacy of straight row tillage. Application of a complete land use program

is the answer to the problem. The question is of course how to accomplish the tremendous task. Mr. Deering says that the USDA is the logical sponsor for this great work. He is skeptical, not to say critical, that the Department is organized to get the job done. He assumes that everyone everywhere is conservation minded, but that the required leadership is lacking.

Most of the states have adopted a partially uniform soil conservation district law. Vital technical assistance has been restricted by the Department to state law organized districts. These districts are administered by farmer committees; likewise, the AAA. The author approves the farmer committee control system but is of the opinion it is not genuine. As matters now stand, parties not within organized conservation districts, who may be ready, willing and even anxious to adopt full soil management farm plans are handicapped to secure necessary technical assistance. The inference is that the author charges most, if not all of the trouble, to misfit organization and ascribes little, if any, cause to conditions produced by the war.

Mr. Deering's investigation and research of the USDA has been full and quite complete, but not with happy results. The reader gets the impression that his criticisms are sometimes not constructive. For instance, on page 88 in a detailed conversation between one Smith and a certain not named or located County Agent is found the following dialog:

"Who can I get to run the lines?" Smith asked.

"Well, I'd do it if I could," the agent said. "But I don't have a level. You might be able to get the vocational agriculture teacher down at the consolidated school to do it for you. He has a level. Joe Green, a farmer who lives over on the other side of town about three miles, has a level, too, and does some work."

So it seems there was no scarcity of levels. Yet, where one was naturally and reasonably to be expected, there wasn't any. The text does not indicate that this may have been an isolated case of dereliction on the part of the county agent. On the contrary, the story is no doubt related to illustrate a lack of efficiency from divided responsibility. Or is it a demonstration of a person believing what he wants to hear?

The book points the way, but where? If toward a more intelligent land use, certainly it is not definite. The diagnosis of this agricultural doctor may be said to be too general and the remedy not specific. However, he lands on both feet at the finish and concludes the discourse on the high note of optimism. In the face of depleted fertility, loss of soil, sub-marginal areas, abandoned farm lands and continuing erosion, the author predicts increasingly greater American agricultural production. He seemingly discounts the wastage of land resources, that an alarming portion of the fertile top soil from American farm lands has gone to the mud banks, the

bayou bottoms, the river deltas and to mingle with the sands of the sea, and the end is not yet. On how the farmer will move on to greener pastures he pins his faith to a better know-how.

This writing does not put its finger on the heart of the philosophy of land husbandry: that the heritage of the land belongs to future generations as well as to the present; exhibits no love of the soil in the romantic sense of the ecologic balance and relation between the flora and fauna and their environment; nor except by empty phrase does it touch a sympathetic understanding of the dependence of all creature life on the land.

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Red Rock, Oklahoma.

Zack Jones, Fisherman-Philosopher. By Helen Swift. (Chicago: A. Kroch And Son, Publishers, 1944. Pp. 225. Cloth \$3.00.)

There has come to the editor's desk a very pleasing volume which would give zest and delight to any reader who pays devotion to the God of out-of-doors. It comes from the pen of Helen Swift, daughter of Gustavus F. Swift, founder of the world famous packing house, bearing his name.

The book is just what it says in its title: the life story (largely put forth in his own babbling tongue) of Zack Jones, a fisherman in the Wisconsin country of Lac Verd. Northern Wisconsin as one knows well, who has enjoyed the privilege of a visit to that region of the state where beautiful blue lakes, fed by cool, purling streams are spotted with pine, larch and shimmering aspen and thousands of wild flowers, offers summer and autumn visitors a veritable paradise.

There, on a glorious September day, Miss Swift took up a thread of life which moved through forty years of vivid experiences. These experiences woven through the lives of the plain fisher folk around the little hamlet, on Lac Verd, were as calm and sweet as the sky blue waters of the lake. They are as appetizing as "the odor of boiling coffee and sizzling bacon." The author gives her first impression of Lac Verd:

For a moment I felt a bit guilty but soon forgot it in the beauty of the scene. The snowy cloth made a dazzling contrast to the vivid green grass, the fallen leaves and the glints of sunshine. Below us was the rocky shore and the turquoise lake without a shadow upon it. The cloth was set with quaint china, green and white; each dish a scene of the hotel or grounds.

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There are three boys standing about the writer on that day, sons of an old fisherman: Amos, Zachariah and Joshua. But it was Zack—Zack Jones—that won the heart and confidence of Miss Swift. A strange, lonely, lank boy with defective speech, no education, but trustworthy, honest, brave and faithful as a soul can be.

All through the book, it is Zack Jones, his kindness, his shrewd understanding of fish, his vital love of birds, his pleasure in the skies, the hills and streams and above all his intuitive understanding of human nature, which the author gives to her readers.

The style is so simple, the characters are so quiet and true, the outdoors so alluring that you walk beside the author through all the summers and autumns of forty years and enjoy this Wisconsin country and its people and feel with her the beauty and glory of the life of Zack Jones as she concludes:

The years that I had known him drifted through my mind like kaleidoscopic pictures: the skinny bare-foot boy, with his sunny smile; the tall lank youth, shouldering responsibility before his time; the portly awkward man, with a sensitive nature, rarely shown to anyone; the honesty and justice in all his dealings; his ability to look on the bright side of almost every question—and now, a discouraged Zack. I recalled the little drab village, as I first knew it, and the changes which had taken place.

Spring came and we returned to Pebble Beach; but not to Zack. We fish now with the sons of Amos, Joshua and Zack. Amos, the eldest of the three, although now old, is still called the best fisherman on the lake. The younger generation, although uninteresting, is popular. But the waters of the lake have lost their charm for me since the spirit of the lake, my trusted companion, is not here to guide me.

The volume is bound in light blue cloth, the type is clear and easy to the reader's eyes. The book will repay the reader, whether it lies upon the office desk, is placed in the library where youth like to read of fishing and boating, or is taken for idle reading on an excursion to streams, lake or mountain.

Charles Evans.

Oklahoma Historical Society.