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THE CONSERVATION OF OUR LAND RESOURCES¹

By Professor JACOB G. LIPMAN

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OUR domestic empire has grown with the spread of land occupation. In historical perspective it was yesterday when a few venturesome spirits struggled to maintain a foothold on a fringe of land stretching from Virginia to Massachusetts. In terms of to-day we are trustees of 3,000,000 square miles of land on the North American Continent. A little of this land has been occupied for about 300 years. Most of it has been occupied for less than 100 years; and many millions of acres of present-day farm land had not been touched by the plow fifty or even thirty years ago. Human currents have eddied and moved forward, to the West, the Northwest and the Southwest. The conquest of the wilderness and the building of homes represent one page of our national record. The opposite page tells another story; one of land exploi-

tation, soil wastage, agricultural decadence in many places and of people wandering back and forth. Now we are in a mood of contemplation and of looking into the future.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO OUR LAND?

Let us consider a very few statistical facts. We have not much less than 2,000,000,000 acres of land surface in the Continental United States. Half of this land is in farms, and a quarter of it is so-called crop land. When the first white settlers came to North America there were about a billion acres of virgin forests within our present national boundaries. Most of these forests have disappeared. They were cut down, burned over and converted into crop acres and pastures. Most of the forest clearing and burning was inevitable. There was no other way for the building of a great nation. But there has been a terrible wastage of timber, of soil and of human effort. We

¹ Address of the vice-president and chairman of the section for agriculture, American Association for the Advancement of Science, St. Louis, 1935.

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