

THE PRACTICE OF DENTISTRY IN THE DROUGHT AREA OF THE WEST

By SYLVESTER MOYER, D.D.S., Rockglen, Sask.

THE Depression, the Drought, and the Hoppers have brought both tragedy and comedy to the dried-out area which spreads over the southern section of the Prairie Provinces.

As a result of the crop failure for six successive years, a peculiar condition has arisen, causing the absolute lack of money even for the bare necessities of life. Every farmer is on relief. Automobiles have been converted into "Bennett-Buggies", and former well-to-do farmers living in grand houses, are bemoaning their painful poverty. As a consequence, dental needs were totally neglected until pain conquered pride, and proud mothers were compelled to bring their crying children to me for

help, since I am the only dentist within a radius of forty miles. These mothers, with tears in their eyes, would say: "We have no money. Can't you help us?"

What did I do? I did just what you would have done, dear reader. I dried more tears and sent more swollen faces home, wrinkled with smiles, during the past three years than I have done during the forty preceding years of my dental practice, fifteen years of which were spent in Galt, Ontario.

One hundred and thirty-four indigent patients called at my office last year. When it became known that they could get an aching tooth removed even without money, whole families came. Some came in wagons, others in Bennett Bug-



In the good old days before Nature began taking her revenge. The old rotation of wheat, wheat, summerfallow, may turn such land as this to desert.

(Photo Courtesy Country Guide.)



The result of one season's drifting. There was little of this until the fibre was worked out of the soil.

(Photo Courtesy Country Guide.)

gies, some on horseback, and others on foot, even in the dead of winter.

Abscessed teeth, swollen faces, pyorrhea, edentulous mouths, unbearable pain, were all among the problems that had to be dealt with.

In this service, however, I was not dispensing charity, for these patients did not wish to be pauperized. They were proud and honest and are still bravely looking for the "rift in the clouds".

They ask for my "bill", which is never questioned and is always strictly ethical. They say, "What can we bring you?" and it is here that I profit from the conditions of adversity. For extractions they usually bring vegetables or poultry. For more extensive service, as fillings, dentures, etc., I require about twenty-five per cent cash and the balance in "What have you?" Barter still continues, as my records show—a scoop-shovel for extracting a tooth—a thoroughbred Angus bull for a full upper and lower denture for a lady in a big house; two hundred live hens and many dead ones; fifty turkeys,

twenty ducks and geese, one hundred pounds of butter, eggs, fresh pork and sausage, sauerkraut, a cellar full of vegetables, cook-stove, heater-stove, fifteen bags of potatoes, twelve tons of lignite coal, five hundred fence posts, thirty-five dollars worth of blacksmithing, forty dollars worth of groceries, mower, wagon, Essex coupé with rumble seat, a garage, five sets of team harness, three horse-collars, four bridles, saddle, thirty head of cattle, thirteen horses, six live pigs and one dead one, blacksmithing outfit, eight tons of hay—but let this suffice.

In all this co-operative bartering business, I have felt the thrill that one experiences from serving and pleasing—more comedy than tragedy.

Quite recently a rather reticent young man presented himself and said "Toothache". I extracted. He put on his hat and said "Hen or Gobbler?" I said "Gobbler."

For a country blacksmith's widow I extracted her teeth and inserted a full upper and lower denture; and in pay-

ment received a cow, a calf, and part of a blacksmith's outfit. She was made so attractive that she was able to marry again within a year and a day of the passing of her first husband — bride, groom, and dentist all happy, and no money exchanged hands.

Our milkman and his wife had both been toothless. I provided them with teeth for which they gave me two cows and calves. These in turn I gave to my hired man to square with him. The same day he traded them to Bud Chelson for a seed-drill and a two-furrow plow.

In this way five persons got rid of what they did not need and in exchange got what they wanted. Not a dollar was required and all were happy.

But while I have found these new paths of business thoroughly interesting, I am conscious of the fact, that I have to a certain extent, lost touch with my dental friends and dental associations which I trust may be renewed when once we reach "Prosperity Corner". In the meantime, we will keep our chins up, even though there be Russian thistle in the stubble.
