
Oklahoma Books

THE University of Oklahoma last month was again attracting national attention as a developer of new ideas for soil conservation.

Plowman's Folly, by Edward H. Faulkner, a small book published by the University Press, was widely quoted all over the country and most reviewers took the view that this book presents the most revolutionary new idea in agriculture advanced in the present century.

The nationwide recognition given this book enhances the reputation already earned by the University Press in the field of better soil utilization, through the publication of several other important books in recent years. These include Paul B. Sears' *Deserts on the March*, published in 1935, which was generally considered the first popular scientific analysis of the dust bowl problem; Sears' *This Is Our World*, published in 1937; Elmer Peterson's *Forward to the Land*, 1942; and *Elementary Soil Fundamentals*, published in 1937 primarily for the use of highway engineers.

Although these previous publications were recognized as highly important in leading public opinion toward the solution of major soil problems, the newest book from the press, *Plowman's Folly*, has had perhaps the most dramatic success of any in the series. *Time Magazine* for example describes the basic thesis of *Plowman's Folly* (that the plow is a great enemy of man) as "One of the most revolutionary ideas in agricultural history."

Reviewers in newspapers in all parts of the country including the *Kansas City Star*, *Dallas Morning News*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *New York Herald Tribune*, *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, *Baltimore Sun*, *Cleveland Press*, *The Saskatchewan Farmer*, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York World Telegram*, and numerous farm publications have agreed that this new University Press book presents a startling challenge to traditional methods of farming and soil conservation.

The editor of the *Columbus Citizen*, Walter Morrow, '17, commented after devoting a column to *Plowman's Folly* that "It is our opinion based on some superficial knowledge of what has happened to the soil, that he has touched off something like an agricultural revolution."

A reviewer in the *State*, Columbia, North Carolina, commented, "If Mr. Faulkner's method of farming should prove to be successful on a big scale, we may reasonably expect a revolution in farming equal in scope and significance to the industrial revolution."

The *San Francisco Chronicle* remarked, "His (Faulkner's) arguments are cogent

and to the point, and the book is as valuable as a challenge to established habits of thought as it is a contribution to agriculture." The weekly book review section of the *New York Herald Tribune* devoted a five-column spread to a review of *Plowman's Folly*, and the reviewer commented that "Mr. Faulkner's statement is one which agricultural scientists will neglect at their peril. He has offered them a challenge which cannot be evaded."

The reviewer in the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, commenting that Faulkner's ideas are revolutionary, adds that "He makes his case so clear and his claims seem so well justified as he explains them, that one wonders if this slim volume might not be rated eventually as the most important book of the century."

The Washington correspondent of the *Indianapolis Times* in a column-long story remarked, "Having published a best seller during the dust storm days (*Deserts on the March* by Paul B. Sears) the University of Oklahoma may have another here."

The *Akron Journal* announced the publication of *Plowman's Folly* by the University of Oklahoma Press with the comment that some agronomists and botanists are characterizing it as "the most sensational new theory of agriculture in this country."

The Oklahoma City Bureau of the *Associated Press* sent out a news story announcing the publication of the book which was widely printed. This story described Faulkner's claims for increased garden and crop production without plowing.

Publishers' Weekly, Camden, New Jersey, one of the principal book trade publications, described *Plowman's Folly* as a "challenge to the present day methods of farming and soil conservation."

The nationwide publicity given the book led to heavy sales, and the book was in its third printing by the middle of August.

The Trade Book Clinic of the Institute of Graphic Arts included *Plowman's Folly* as one of the six books in its August selections. *Publishers' Weekly*, in its August 7 edition, complimented the University Press on its skillful production of the book with a statement "The efforts expended by the University of Oklahoma Press on its *Plowman's Folly* have produced a delightful volume. With no illustrations and almost no decoration, a book of which the subject matter is of limited interest, has been made inviting and physically attractive by skillful planning and excellent execution."

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Faulkner's theory is that much of the waning fertility of the soils can be attributed to use of the moldboard plow. By experiments carried out on a commercial scale in Ohio, he has demonstrated the possibilities in disc-harrowing soil as a preparation for planting. His cultivation method is to enrich the surface of the soil by cutting and chopping in natural green fertilizers—weeds or cover crops already growing on the land—directly into the surface of the soil rather than plowing them deeply under. He agrees that turning under the organic matter deprives the new crop of plant food and also establishes a blotter far below the surface that soaks up moisture from both above and below, keeping it away from the surface where it is needed.

Faulkner argues that by grinding only the surface of the soil and leaving all humus materials to decay there, the farmer can establish the same basic soil economy found in an undisturbed forest or meadow and that this practice conserves moisture and prevents soil erosion.

Time Magazine reported, after sending a staff member to Washington to make inquiries at the United States Department of Agriculture, that H. H. Bennett, soil conservation director, stated that federal experts were thinking along the same line as Faulkner and that the moldplow is doomed, except for some special crops and uses.

It is, perhaps, somewhat surprising to find such a revolutionary and constructive new theory in agriculture reaching the general public of the United States through a university which does not have a single class in agriculture in its curriculum.

The publication of *Plowman's Folly*, however, continues to a new high point the program of publishing books on soil conservation and utilization which the University Press started back in 1935 with *Deserts on the March*. Although this particular field is only one of several in which the University of Oklahoma Press has achieved nation wide prestige, it is perhaps the most important in its influence on the future economic development of the entire central states of the nation, the area most affected by the struggle to maintain and improve production from the soil.—By R. C.

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Marines

Lt. Hershel S. Carver, Jr., '38-'41, Holdenville, is a bomber pilot in the Marine Air Corps on foreign duty.

Pvt. John C. Hunt, '43, Pawhuska, was in training with a Marine detachment at Louisiana Polytechnic Institute in Ruston.

Coast Guard

Caleb F. Carpenter, '37-'41, Oklahoma City, electrician's mate second class in the Coast Guard, was stationed in Boston.

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