

## STORIES of New Jersey

ered land erodes only slightly. But farmers intent on getting quick returns from their labor have continually planted crops such as corn, potatoes and wheat and have thus exposed large areas to sheet erosion. In the last 20 years of the 19th century more than 300,000 acres were plowed to corn, and another 150,000 acres were sown in wheat. At present more than 150,000 acres are devoted to the production of corn, 50,000 acres are in wheat and another 50,000 acres are in potatoes. Every year farmers allow almost 200,000 acres to lie idle, unprotected by soil-holding crops. This idle land, deprived of protection, often erodes more than land planted to corn or potatoes.

With the development of the great corn and wheat belts of the middle and far West, New Jersey farmers turned to other crops for cash returns; many regions in northern Jersey changed to dairy farming. The farmer, occupied with care of his stock, raising feed and many other problems, made no systematic effort to check continued erosion of cultivated field and pasture land.

When motor vehicles displaced the horse, farmers could no longer depend on a sufficient supply of manure to fertilize their fields. Vegetable and fruit growers relied on commercial fertilizers which, however, did not contain the organic matter that makes manure so valuable in combating erosion. Furthermore, grass, the best preventive against erosion, seldom is used in the rotation of crops in South Jersey because there is no longer a real market for hay. In 1900 there were 100,000 horses on Jersey farms; now there are barely 40,000.



*Water washing out a cornfield*

Machinery made it possible to work the land so finely and so often that the soil was reduced to a pulverized state which made it most susceptible to sheet erosion. Moreover, it tempted the farmer to put more and more land under cultivation. Pasture and woodland were sacrificed to the production of market crops that would bring quick returns. Burdened with heavy mortgages and a high tax rate, farmers forced the soil to the limit and put even the steeper slopes under cultivation.