

SOIL AND HEALTH

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as 1,800—three times that carried by the most improved farm land in the United States.

Evidence from Japan

My recent visit to Japan surprised me in spite of my reading upon the subject. The most unpromising soil, and the most difficult terrain notwithstanding—food is produced, two crops per year, by this closed cycle of operations, and a population supported in a state of health and happiness which is astonishing when the state of the ruined cities, destroyed industry, and millions of displaced persons is taken into consideration. Here I found little evidence of malnutrition. Such as does exist, is less than 1 per cent. and that mainly beriberi. Could our agriculture do as much for us with even our wretchedly small populations by comparison and in countries free from the tremendous soil destroying cataclysms that beset Japan—earthquake and typhoon? Their efforts at soil conservation alone are staggering, in their obvious rejection of money cost as a measure of what should be done.

King, who was one time head of the U.S. Soil Service, quotes an instance of a peach orchard with trees planted in rows and two feet apart, with ten

rows of cabbages, two rows of Windsor beans, and one of garden peas—13 rows of vegetables flanked by fruit trees in 22 feet, all luxuriant and strong. That is the sort of picture I saw in Japan when I expected to find a broken, confused, and even starving people, and the central fact is that the bulk of the people are peasants, and all of them, whether in country or town, grow food-stuffs, using as the fertilising agent human excreta fermented with straw and garden refuse.

Must we painstakingly retrace our steps to an ancient traditional means of agriculture—the only one which has led to the survival of civilisations so old as those of the orient, and compared with which ours are infantile growths.

Must we discover toxins, hormones, catalysts, and antibodies and after a flat refusal to accept the evidence of their potent actions, finally build a whole literature about them? Must we do all this and refuse to take the simple step of perceiving that they are all involved in the life and function of the soil which maintains us?

Sir George Stapledon's Advice

A friend of mine, who is the third generation of a famous farming family in New England, N.S.W., has restored his pastures from the state to which they

degenerated after some 30 years of application of inorganic fertiliser under direction of the prevailing authoritative view. To-day, his pastures stand out among those of his neighbours, even his worst country carrying a splendid mixed fodder cover by comparison. He has merely carried out the advice of Sir George Stapledon, the noted English pasture authority, and has after one application of phosphate, lightly ploughed in the pasture and kept to a system of long rotations, resting the land and building up the organic content of his soils. He always gets top price for his animals and his wool, and his land carries more sheep to the acre than anyone else's. He has the lowest disease incidence in the countryside. He has, in fact, watched his worm infestation diminish as his pastures improved, and his farm records are as fine a contribution to scientific literature as any that earned academic fame.

When I asked him what his neighbours say, he replied—"They say, 'Oh, the Colonel can afford to do it.'" Note the influence of the prevailing outlook—financial expediency.

Here in New Zealand, 18 months ago, I saw a redeemed citrus farm in Bay of Islands which despite unprecedented drought had received no watering even at the end of February, and had had no application of insecticide. All the local citrus growers took me to see this orchard as an object lesson, for they had been watering since Novem-

ber, and all had used red oil. Yet these trees were healthier, and being a citrus grower myself, I could judge. What was the secret? The farmer had trenched the ground two feet deep round each tree, and had filled the trench with compost—an artificially produced organic fertiliser, rich in humus, and one which imitates the age-old method of the Chinese.

Napoleon Said It

For too long, human nutrition has been a piecemeal study of chemists and biochemists, when after all, it really is a matter of farming and of raising of healthy human stock, just as we can raise healthy farm stock. Having been misled by a scientific fashion of the times, in respect of farm stock, is there any wonder that we have been even more misled over human beings? . . .

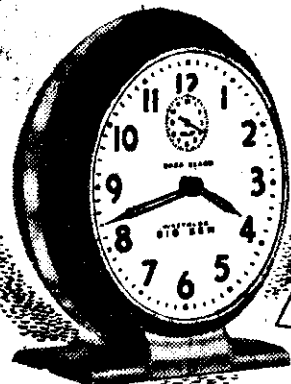
Napoleon, waiting for the end at St. Helena, made a commentary on this that deserves to be repeated at the end of this discourse:

"Agriculture is the soul, the foundation of the kingdom; industry ministers to the comfort and happiness of the population; foreign trade is the superabundance; it allows the exchange of the surplus of agriculture and industry. Foreign trade, which in its results is infinitely inferior to agriculture, was an object of secondary importance to my mind. Foreign trade ought to be the servant of agriculture and home industry; these last should never be subordinated to foreign trade."

NURSES must rise early

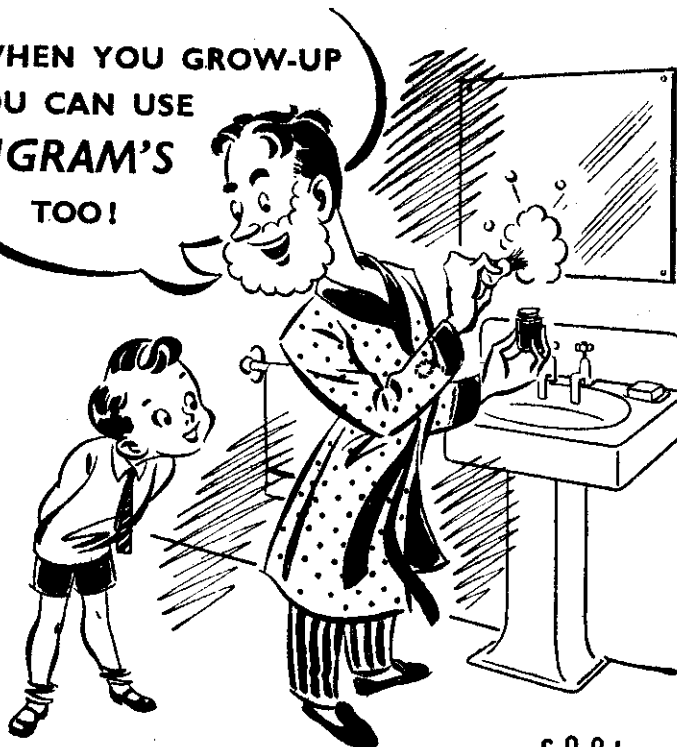
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