

# Backsetting the Farmer

## III.—Agriculture and the Greatness of Nations

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As has been already stated, national greatness has its source in the land. Tilling the soil and caring for flocks and herds were men's primary occupations and agriculture was brought to a highly advanced state by many ancient and heathen nations.

Persia and Babylonia were highly cultivated and densely populated over five hundred years B.C. The land was brought under an excellent system of irrigation and was very fruitful. Wheat was produced, yielding two hundred and three hundred-fold, while barley and apples were also grown extensively. The palm was made to produce wine, vinegar, honey and meal. The terra-cotta, bronze, and ivory work, enamelled bricks and manufactured textile fabrics of these ancients were equal, if not superior, to those of the present day. Their terraces and hanging gardens are among the wonders of the world. The people were well versed in astronomy and from them we get our Arabic notation. They invented a rude alphabet and are said to have had a code of laws 2,250 years before the birth of Christ. Now the country is a comparative desert and the people are few and impoverished.

### Land Laws of the Jews

Palestine was, at her best, an almost perfectly developed agricultural nation. The land laws, as well as the moral laws, of the Jews were excellent and are worthy of attentive study today. Some of the features of the laws relating to land were:

- (a) A plot of land was given to each head of a family.
  - (b) Land was easy to acquire and hard to alienate.
  - (c) The land came back to the original owner in the year of Jubilee, which came every fifty years.
  - (d) Land lost could be redeemed at any time on payment of the value of the unexpired term.
  - (e) The Fallow Year came every seventh year, when the land had to be rested and the natural crop went to the poor.
  - (f) Farming was looked upon with honor and the highest men of the nation took part in it.
  - (g) The people had a knowledge of trees, roots and fruits. The grafting of fruits was well known to them, and great care was taken to preserve the fertility of the soil.
- Now the fertility is gone and the people are wretchedly poor.

### Decline of Egyptians

Egypt was at one time the storehouse of the world and at the height of her prosperity had a population of from six to seven millions. Agriculture was the chief pursuit. The people were divided into castes and occupations descended from father to son. The farmers were among the highest order and were considered superior to the merchants. The land, irrigated by the waters of the Nile, was admirably adapted to the growing of wheat, and the nation became very wealthy and highly civilized. The pyramids, the Sphinx and the mausoleums show a marvellous knowledge of the mechanical powers. It is claimed that the Egyptians had steam, railways and electric light, also the microscope, that they had an intricate knowledge of engraving, porcelain making, glass blowing and the manufacture of paper and books, and that nearly every great social question was thoroughly discussed by her great men. But in time the lands were neglected, fertility declined and the nation sank into poverty and ignorance. It is interesting to note the great prosperity that has re-

cently been brought about in this country by British engineering skill and wise administration.

Spain, under the Saracens, 1,200 years ago, was more highly developed agriculturally than any country of modern Europe up to twenty-five years ago. Both the theoretical and practical side of agriculture were developed and the people enjoyed a time of great prosperity. The magnificent gardens and palaces of those days are in striking contrast with the extreme and depressing poverty of Spain today. We are indebted to the Saracens for what many no doubt consider a recent discovery, the farm silo.

Mexico, before the advent of Cortez, had agriculture as a finished science. Everybody except the soldiers worked on the land. They preserved the forests, summer-fallowed the land and became very wealthy. The chafing dish, supposed to be a modern novelty, was used by the Mexicans hundreds of years ago. History marvels at the accomplishments of that ancient people. Everybody is familiar with present conditions in that once prosperous country.

### The Aztec Age

Pern was naturally an arid district, largely steep hillsides. When the Spanish visited that country they found that the natives had terraced the slopes, had brought water five hundred miles for irrigation and domestic purposes, had made roads, suspension bridges and dug rock tunnels—and had done this without iron. The land was divided in



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equal shares and everybody worked on it. Idleness was a crime, punished by death. No one was rich, no one was poor, everybody was comfortable. Now the great works of that country are in ruins and the people generally in a backward and destitute condition.

### Poverty Follows Soil Exhaustion

Coming down to modern times: New England was the cradle of freedom, the home of democracy, the land where they built school-houses and raised men. Thousands of the farms there were practically abandoned years ago, thru depleted fertility of the soil; mournful testimony to the fact that the English speaking farmer could create desolation scarcely less hopeless than the Mongol or the Turk.

The wheat raising centres of the United States are steadily moving West and North as the soil is exploited and exhausted.

The average yield of wheat in Manitoba has fallen off about five bushels per acre since the land was first cultivated.

In Alberta and Saskatchewan there are no signs of soil exhaustion as yet, but there are unmistakable signs of danger from foul weeds and from floods and washouts caused by forest depletion. There are also too many unoccupied homesteads, conspicuous as "sunflower sanatoriums and noxious weed resorts."

What causes led up to Palestine's greatness as an agricultural nation?

(1) Her excellent, equitable land laws by which every man became a producer.

(2) Co-operation under the patriarchal or family form of government.

What causes led to her decline?

(1) The breaking away of the people from the laws.

(2) Soil impoverishment.

(3) Wars and dissensions.

What were the causes of the success of the heathen nations referred to?

(1) Their successful cultivation of the land, by which they produced great wealth.

(2) Their co-operation under the form of government of master and slave.

What were the causes of their decline?

(1) The people forsook the land.

(2) Drones or non-workers became too numerous, wars drained the resources of the country and took the people away from the land, which, being neglected, failed to produce.

### Secret of Civilization

The secret of civilization is co-operation—that is real co-operation in wages, votes, production, distribution, selling and buying. In the ancient system the form of co-operation was master and slave and the driving force was fear. Under the feudal system the form was lord and serf, the driving force being submission to authority. Under the present or wage system hired men

take the place of slaves or serfs, and the compelling power is money, or gain, or a living. The coming system will be the brotherhood of man. Machinery will take the place of slaves or hired men. The men will take an interest because of love of the work and because they will get a share of the profits. The use of land will be open for all. There will be union for strength and time and opportunity for each person to develop his individuality.

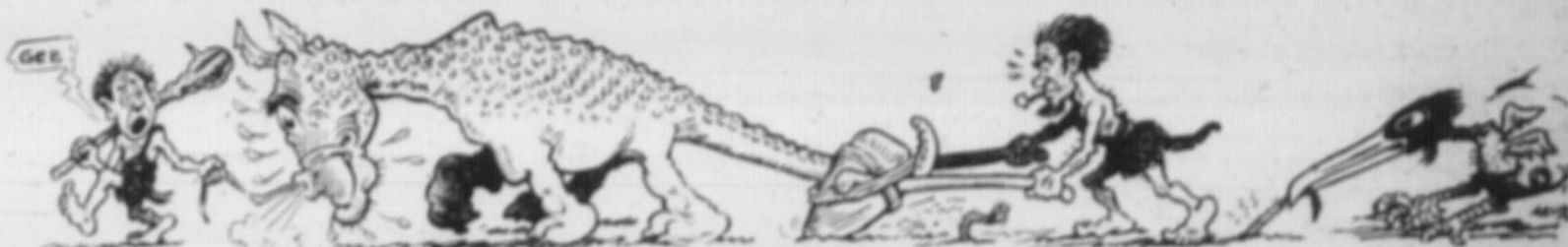
While many different causes contributed towards the neglect of the land by the people it was this neglect that impoverished the nation. It has been stated as a general principle that two centuries of livelihood from the soil without building it up will drive the people into extreme and depressing poverty.

### China's Contrast

China may be cited as a contrast to the fate of many of the ancient nations. There have been no changes in her laws and customs for thousands of years. Under pressure of a great population the fertility of the soil has been preserved. The president of the Ontario Agricultural College, who visited China a year or two ago, states that the whole country is under most intensive cultivation, that there are families living on less than one acre of land, that great attention is paid to putting fertilizers on the soil so as to keep up its productiveness. In China the laborer is superior to the artificer. The country has never gone out after trade. In fact, extreme measures have been taken to keep it out, the desire of the nation being to be left alone on the land.

After the fall of the Roman Empire Europe was devastated by wars. For purposes of defence the small farms had to give way to large holdings. The danger in dividing lands led to the laws of primogeniture and entail and to the establishment of the

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