

The big chunk of ice was found in Texas last May by a Pittsburgh, Pa., scientist. Dr. R. A. Glenn of the Coal Research Laboratory of the Carnegie Institute of Technology, Pittsburgh, was visiting his parents at a farm outside McKinney, Texas, May 3. The hail fell in connection with a tornado which cost three lives and injured 43 people. But Weather Bureau records of the storm indicate no damage from the hail.

The biggest hailstone he found was photographed beside a baseball. The stone was

bigger. Dr. Glenn also reported that the hail had dented a corrugated sheet iron roof.

The picture is being added to the Weather Bureau's "rogues' gallery" of hailstones. But it is not the biggest one. The Texas stone was 11 inches in circumference, compared with one 17 inches around, which fell at Potter, Nebr., July 6, 1928. That one still rates as the largest ever recorded in the world.

Science News Letter, August 21, 1948

Letters To The Editor

200-Inch Poem

On the completion of the 100-inch telescope on Mt. Wilson several years ago, Dr. Alfred Noyes was invited to be one of the first to inspect the new instrument. He wrote a wonderful poem on the occasion which is the introductory portion of his extensive poetic work on astronomy, *Watchers of the Sky*. I think it would be a splendid idea for the California Institute of Technology to interest Dr. Noyes at this time when the new 200-incher is getting itself ready for service.—Dr. Harold T. Mead, Head of Science Department, Rider College, Trenton 9, New Jersey. *Pasadena, please take notice.*

Hillside Farming

There are a few points I would like to raise with regards to your comments on farming on hillsides (SNL, July 10).

First of all, I agree with you that it would be more rational to try to find some high yielding food plants that could be grown on hillsides. But this is only part of the story. There is a lot hidden behind the innocent sounding words "clean cultivation." William Faulkner in his *Plowman's Folly* (University of Oklahoma Press) showed that clean cultivation was the culprit behind erosion, decreased farm productivity, and floods. The simple fact is that plants and decaying plant materials act as

a sponge to absorb water, and also act as a binding agent to hold soil particles together. In fact the very concept of soil becomes meaningless as such without the presence of decaying organic materials. Plants will not grow in crushed stone or sand alone. It is important to note at this point that soilless farming (hydroponics) is a basically different method of farming and data applicable to one method is definitely not applicable to the other.

Returning to our original line of thought, clean cultivation is the real "force of habit" culprit and a little investigation discloses that it originated at a time when the soil was so rich in organic material of all sizes that the farmer had to drag tree branches and other large materials out of the way of his plow. The result of clean cultivation is that the materials necessary for plant growth are not replaced in the soil. This leads to a gradual decrease in farm productivity as the materials in the soil are used up. As the United States was being settled and the West was being opened up, a man was not a real farmer unless he had "used up" two or three farms in his lifetime. There was plenty of rich virgin soil to the west, so why should he conserve the farm he had? Our country is settled and the total acreage is relatively fixed, yet "force of habit" farm methods are unchanged. . . .—Fred J. Mocking, Chicago, Ill.

Story of Grass

"The Blessed Meek" (SNL, Aug. 14) is an inspired piece of writing; its point is the very point of grass, which I am afraid many persons miss, and it pays honor to Mrs. Chase in a most heart-warming way.—Alfred Stefferud, Editor of the Yearbook, U. S. Department of Agriculture. *Thanks.*

Science News Letter, August 21, 1948

Cashew trees are important economically in the tropics where they grow; their decomposed leaves make good fertilizer, the wood is suitable for many uses, the sap yields a resinous gum and the bark contains a high percent of tannin.

The red color of *strawberries* is due to the presence of an anthocyanin pigment.

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