



Unprofitable Islands

► UNCLE SAM is due to fall heir to a lot of scattered parcels of real estate, out in the Pacific. The Gilberts, Marshalls, Marianas and other groups of small Pacific islands over which we have progressively gained military control in the past year or so, will doubtless become our permanent responsibility in some form or other. Either they will be mandated to us by a new international organization, or we shall acquire outright ownership of them.

A few—one or two of the choicest out of each group—will be developed as commercial air bases and as military-naval strongholds. They will be worth all of the money we have lavished on them in war, and all we shall add for peacetime use and security.

Most of the rest are likely to become plain administrative headaches. None of them has any mineral resources, for without exception they are either masses of lava or pancakes of coral rock and sand. Only the largest islands, like Guam or Saipan, have good soil in large enough tracts to justify the establishment of plantations for the production of sugar or other subtropical crops. Practically all of the smaller islands are sparsely inhabited, for the simple reason that it is hard to scratch out a living of even the simplest sort on them.

If Micronesia is not to become a permanent drain on the American purse, we shall have to do some research and planning for economic uses that will make the area as nearly self-supporting as possible. And we should begin at least to outline such research right away.

Two possibilities suggest themselves. One is fish. The waters around many of these islands are full of tropical fish.

Some of these are known to be good food, but the usefulness of the others is still an unknown quantity. Fisheries men should be given a chance to look into this without delay—the more so with the world now facing a serious protein shortage.

The second possibility is the production of subtropical and tropical fruits and oil seeds ashore, even without deep and fertile soils. Some of the best orange groves in Florida stand in soil that is practically pure sand; carefully adjusted applications of fertilizer feed their roots. Something

of the same kind might well be tried on these islands. The next decade may well see the world's biggest development of hydroponics, far out in the Pacific.

Science News Letter, March 3, 1945

Goose barnacles have been found on the humpback whale, but they do no damage except to impede swimming.

Whisky, after a lapse of five years, is now in production again in Scotland to an extent of about one-fourth the prewar quantity.



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