



All Flesh Is Grass

➤ NEBUCHADNEZZAR, the king who literally "went to grass" has become a traditional figure of pity, mingled perhaps with a little contempt. Though in his madness he gnawed the grass at its roots, his fall was not so great as we may fancy—only the height of a grass-haulm. For all of us, wise men and madmen alike, are eaters of grass; only we ordinarily feed at the top instead of the bottom of the stem.

Everyone who eats bread, or rice, or tortillas, or oaten porridge, or polenta, or hominy grits, or any other food made from grain, eats grass. All grains are grasses, and all the grain we grind and eat is the seed of grasses.

When you stir cane sugar into your coffee or tea, or eat it in candy or ice cream, you are again a grass-eater, this time at a slight remove. Sugar cane is also a giant grass, and sugar is merely its boiled-down and refined sap.

Finally, when you eat meat or cheese or butter or drink milk, you are getting your grass second hand. All our meat and dairy animals feed on grass, and if beeves and hogs are finished for the market on grain,

they are eating grass seed just as we do in our bread or rice.

Except for the grasses which the cattle eat, the species chosen by man for cultivation are the giants of their tribe. Sugar cane, corn and bamboo are the biggest of all grasses, while wheat, rice, rye and the other so-called "small grains" are still much larger than the great majority of grass species.

Of course the grains were selected by early man as his principal food not because of their height but for the size of their seed. There are a good many other tall

grasses, some of them taller than wheat or rye, that were never given the advantages of cultivation, simply because their seeds are too small or too scanty to be worth the labor of harvesting and grinding.

While our cultivated grains are undoubtedly bigger and more prolific than their wild ancestors, even in the wild forms they were worth the trouble of collecting and preparing. It is even suggested by some anthropologists that agriculture originated from the sprouting of seed gathered in the wild and chance-scattered near primitive man's dwellings.

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PSYCHOLOGY

Machine Tests Logic

➤ SCIENCE now has a machine that flashes a stop light at an illogical argument.

It can't be used in Congress or in a street corner argument. Dr. Benjamin Burack of Roosevelt College, Chicago, explains in his report to the journal, SCIENCE (June 17) that the machine has to be set up for particular argument before it will operate.

To operate the machine it is necessary to select blocks to represent the major premise, minor premise and conclusion and put these blocks into three spaces provided on the panel of the machine. A light then automatically flashes on for each fallacy in the argument and a printed card beside the light describes the fallacy in

logical terms.

The whole machine is mounted in the top of a suitcase and the blocks used are in plywood compartments in the bottom part of the case. The entire outfit weighs only 25 pounds.

Limitation of the machine, according to its inventor, is that the argument must first be put into logical form before the appropriate blocks can be fed into the machine.

Earlier machines, Dr. Burack says, have been developed to indicate the conclusions which can be drawn from given premises, but none of them was capable of testing the logic of conclusions already drawn and pointing out and identifying the fallacies.

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POPULATION

Asia Over-Populated

➤ WILL the peasant of Asia change his ways of early marriage and frequent babies in time to prevent the population explosion that threatens the East? This is the question raised by a population expert, Dr. Irene Taeuber, of Princeton University, before the meeting of the Population Association of America in Princeton, N. J.

Dr. Taeuber believes that the Asiatic peasant will change his ways and limit his family, but it is a question whether he can change quickly enough to avert the calamity that will otherwise inevitably result from the tremendously increasing population under conditions of modernization and reduced death rates.

The peasant in Asia developed his ideas about having babies in pre-modern times, Dr. Taeuber explained. Then a high death rate, an infant mortality rate probably well above 200 per 1,000 births, periodically severe malnutrition, an occasional epidemic, civil disorders and violence all combined to make permanent survival of the group precarious.

In the face of such hazards, individual groups would have been wiped out if it had not been for high fertility rates.

But behavior developed over thousands of years as one essential to survival, Dr. Taeuber pointed out, now produces such an abundance of children that their numbers menace survival at the more humane levels made possible by order, medical and sanitary technologies and improved agriculture.

But Dr. Taeuber has no doubt that the Asiatic ideas about size of family will change.

"There is accumulating evidence," she said, "that fertility yields under the stimulus and the pressures of modernization, whether the group concerned be the Catholics or the Protestants of the West, the Confucians of China, the Buddhists of Siam, the Shintoists of Japan or the Moslems of Indonesia."

Although some people think that the present traditions with regard to family are accepted unquestioningly by the Asiatic peasant because they always have been and nothing else is envisioned as possible, Dr. Taeuber points to evidence of tensions in the upper groups as revealed by literature and in the peasant masses by the ever-recurrent problem of infanticide.

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