



The Curse of the Plow

See Front Cover

A SUPERSTITION, false in itself, is sometimes true in a wide symbolic sense never guessed at either by the people who entertained or those who refuted it.

The plow has been the subject of two strange superstitions in America, one by Indians, one by white men. When iron plows were first introduced, something over a century ago, many farmers insisted on retaining their old, admittedly inefficient wooden implements because, they said, iron plows would "poison the soil and make it unfit for growing crops." They soon got over their nonsense, of course, and presently everybody was using iron plows.

Two or three generations later, when

their descendants were streaming out into the Western prairies and plains, in wave after wave of tremendous, land-hungry migration, the hostile Indians held as much enmity against their plows as they did against the men who brought them. Time after time, when raiding Indians attacked wagon trains, they spent their most vindictive arrows, and even their precious powder and shot, on the inanimate farm implements. Captive redskins explained that the plow would "bury the buffalo, and then the Indian could hunt no more."

That also was a rather absurd notion on the face of it. Yet in a few years the buffalo were gone as effectually as though the plow had buried them, and the Indian hunted no more. The plow had banished the buffalo as surely as if it had buried that moving larder of the Plains Indian, for plowed wheatland and native grassland range for buffalo could not occupy the same place at the same time.

And now, in years of drought and duststorms and floods, we are seeing how truly "poisonous" the plow can be to the soil itself, if used without knowledge or regard for the laws of nature. For one of the heavy contributing causes of westward migration in the middle of the nineteenth century was the increasing poverty of farmlands in the East, cultivated too closely for permanence of the soil by the early generations of farmers. With the iron plow, and the great progeny of improved agricultural implements that followed it, the farmer could loosen the soil more

deeply, turn out stones and roots that would have wrecked his old wooden plow, and thus exposed more and more land to the destructive forces of erosion. So he had to move on.

And where he went, he repeated the fatal errors he had made in his old home. Not in wantonness or malice, but in sheer ebullience of energy and hopefulness and ambition, he broke with his plow the sod of the Plains. And like a furious genii at the breaking of a seal, the demons of dust and drought have risen to curse the plow. We shall have much ado to exorcise them.

(The picture of the plow, abandoned in the desert it helped to make, is from the dramatic film, "The Plow That Broke the Plains," prepared by the Resettlement Administration.

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ECOLOGY

Rhododendrons Aided By Freezing Weather

FREEZING is a good thing for young rhododendron bushes—it kills the wilt fungus that is prime enemy of nursery stock of this favorite ornamental shrub, and hence a cause of high prices. Dr. Richard P. White of Rutgers University has discovered that cold eliminates the fungus without harming the hardy bushes, which are used to severe winters in their native mountains.

In general, says Dr. White, culture conditions for rhododendrons should simulate nature as closely as possible: cool, light, acid soils with plenty of leafmold; not too much irrigation.

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