

# *Desperate* HARVESTS

*By Luke Neely*



HAVING recently returned to this country after two years in Japan and Korea, I am seeing many features of the American scene with new eyes. What impresses me most is our sheer wealth of space — not merely the open land of the West, but the stretches of relatively unexploited land to be seen in even our most populous areas. While traveling around the country since my return, I have constantly marveled at the vast amount of ground given to such things as parks, playing fields, golf courses, and lawns, or simply lying idle.

Things are different in the Far East. In Japan, especially, an American is acutely aware of the congestion and lack of elbow room. For there, in a country with an area roughly that of California, live more than 80,000,000 people. Only 20 per cent of the land is arable, and that 20 per cent is probably the most intensively cultivated land in the world.

The main crop, of course, is rice. It is planted entirely by hand, in tiny fields in the river valleys and on terraces which climb the hillsides like giant staircases. So precious is the soil that many farmers whose property is crossed by power lines plan their rows so that poles will come *between* them and not reduce their crop by a single stalk.

In the cities of Japan, only the very wealthy have yards or gardens of any size. The average Japanese with a little ground beside his house is likely to plant vegetables. (An American friend with whom I was discussing Japanese baseball remarked that the most impressive thing about the growth of baseball in Japan was that it had taken place in the one country where there was virtually no such thing as a vacant lot.)

In Korea, this necessary aversion to waste ground is similarly evident. During the country's forty years under Japanese rule, the cultivation

of rice was intensified so that part of the annual shortage in Japan could be made up. However, even in Korea the people have long been accustomed to "spring hunger" lasting from the time the previous year's rice stores are gone until early barley and vegetables have been harvested.

One of the incidental tragedies of the war in Korea is the great harm done to the complex irrigation systems which controlled the water levels in rice paddies. The extensive acreage needed for Army installations and air fields could be obtained only by draining rice fields. In South Korea, the ubiquitous bulldozers of the Eighth Army did tremendous (though mostly unavoidable) damage to the carefully articulated networks of dikes and ditches which represented the labor of centuries.

THE DESPERATION with which the Korean soil is worked was symbolized for me by a vegetable garden which was the project of an elderly couple in Seoul in the summer of 1952. Their home in the middle of the city had been flattened during one of the destructive battles that had ruined Seoul, and all that remained of it was the foundation stones and shattered roof tiles. Making the best of their loss, the old people had raked all the debris into a pile, neatly stacked the few intact tiles, and planted vegetables where

their dwelling had stood — a tiny field of squash where the kitchen had been, patches of cabbage and cucumbers for the bedrooms, and, in the little courtyard, onions. The ground could not be wasted.

But for sheer ingenuity no one could beat Mr. Pak. One spring day in 1953, after my return to Korea as a correspondent, I looked from the window of an Army train crossing the Han River and saw that several of the huge cups which had been left along the sandy north bank of the river by air bombardment were lined with concentric circles of green. The next day I jeeped back to the river with an interpreter to satisfy my curiosity.

There we found Mr. Pak, a very old man, hoeing at the bottom of one of the craters. He had planted barley in the holes, neatly terracing it on the sides to form the circles I had seen from the train. He explained to us that he had tried planting on the level part of the river bank but had been defeated by the steady eroding breeze off the river. However, down in these huge holes the seed was safe from the wind. We inspected several of his craters and found them all ringed with thriving green barley.

I think the crews of the B-29's that dropped the bombs that made these holes would feel a lot better about their misses if they could have seen Mr. Pak's unique plantings.



# OUR *fifth* LARGEST BUSINESS

*by Roy Ramsdell*

WITHIN the last 25 years, welfare has grown from an esoteric, little-known occupation of spinsters and misfits to the fifth largest "business" in the country. The half-dozen or so government bureaus which, in 1930, were distributed inconspicuously among several departments, have been combined into a full-fledged department with cabinet status and the second largest share of the Federal budget.

The 1930 census, listing social work for the first time as a separate occupational classification, enumerated 31,241 of these strange creatures. In 1950, the Census Bureau counted some 93,000 people who claimed welfare in one or another of its phases as their occupation. Yet the census figures fall far short of giving a true picture of the "welfare business" since they enumerate only

the "executive staff," and do not count the millions who derive their sole support, or a major part of it, from the funds distributed by social agencies.

Since the mid-thirties, the business of welfare has been dominated by two great "cartels," one government operated, the other privately operated. Together they control about 95 per cent of the welfare operations in the country.

The larger and more powerful of these "cartels" consists of a nationwide system of public welfare units operating under the charter of the Social Security Act. In many counties, the welfare department ranks second only to the school department in the size of its budget and its influence on the active vote. Although there had been state welfare departments for many years before