

EDITORIAL.

SOIL EROSION.

An interesting discussion on Soil Erosion took place at the March meeting of the Estate Products Sub-Committee, when the Report of the Soil Erosion Committee came up for consideration.

This discussion indicated that there is still considerable difference of opinion in regard to some of the recommendations of the Committee and also some misconception of the measures advocated.

On one point, however, complete agreement was in evidence, namely in the harmful effect of scrapers. It is much to be regretted that this opinion is not more widely reflected in actual estate practice. For, though the use of scrapers is generally denied, it is still a matter of common experience to see such weapons—often of a most vicious type—in use.

One misconception which seems somewhat widely held by those in favour of clean weeding is that the opponents of this system favour the uncontrolled growth of any and every kind of vegetation, grasses included. No justification for this idea can be drawn from the report of the Soil Erosion Committee. On the contrary, it is generally agreed that certain weeds, and certain types of grasses in particular, are injurious and must be eliminated, and the importance of the proper *control* of cover crops has been continually stressed by those advocating their trial. To this it is retorted that such control involves additional expenditure. It is doubtful whether many estates have reliable figures on this point but, *assuming* for the sake of argument that some extra expenditure is involved, it may well be asked whether such expenditure would not fully justify itself. In this connection we would again refer our readers to the article by Mr. George Brown in *The Tea Quarterly*, Vol. IV., page 117.

There is a deep-rooted feeling in many minds that an estate which is not clean weeded is a "dirty" estate, the implication being that such a condition is evidence of general slackness and bad management.

But such an implication really defeats the argument to which it is applied, namely the claim that when such an estate is taken in hand and clean weeded an immediate improvement in the tea is apparent, the whole of the credit for the change being put down to the clean weeding. If the previous condition were due to lack of control it is at least arguable that the improvement was brought about by improved cultivation and organisation at least as much as by clean weeding.

A more valid, though we hope only temporary, argument in favour of clean weeding is that really suitable cover crops are not generally available. But it is particularly to meet this argument that some progressive action is required by estate proprietors. We think few persons will deny that vast damage and loss is caused by soil erosion. Admitting this, is it too much to suggest that estates should set aside small areas for the *trial* of different cover crops? Were this done on a reasonably wide scale there would soon be available data as to the species most suitable for various districts and the best methods of establishment and control, and information as to the effect, beneficial or otherwise, of particular species on the tea would rapidly be accumulated. Several varieties of cover crops are now being tried out at St. Coombs but it is obvious that the success or failure of any particular variety under the condition prevailing there is no criterion as to the behaviour of such a variety in areas under totally different conditions of elevation and climate. We would, therefore, press most strongly for experiments of the type suggested to be carried out by as many estates as possible, full records, including costing figures, being kept of the experimental areas for comparison with areas not so treated.

Quite apart from the soil erosion aspect of cover crops we would remind visiting agents and estate proprietors, from whom the impulse for such work must originate, of the beneficial effect of such crops on soil conditions generally. Attention has frequently been called to this aspect of the question in the pages of *The Tea Quarterly* but it is desirable again to stress this point at a time of economic depression like the present, when the question of conserving and building up soil fertility is a matter of grave concern to the majority of estates.

It only remains to add that in any cases where such experiments are contemplated the Institute will do everything possible to assist.

MOISTURE IN TEA.

Arrangements have now been completed with Messrs. Baird & Tatlock, Ltd., 14-17 Cross Street, Hatton Gardens, London, E.C. 1, for the supply of a suitable apparatus for the determination of moisture in tea.

The price for the complete equipment (in London) is £6.8.9. For quantities of three dozens the price will be reduced to £5.13.3.; and for quantities of fifty to £5.9.0.

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