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Editorial

Stimulation of Desert Plant Research in the United States as a Little-known Result of the Russian Revolution of 1917. In 1917, a United States citizen who had made his mark in developing mineral resources in Arizona and elsewhere, asked President Woodrow Wilson to suggest a charitable or philanthropic project in which he could place a significant part of his wealth. Much to this man's surprise, the President suggested a mercy-mission to the Russian people. The Russian Revolution was in progress. The mining man agreed to finance a Red Cross team taking humanitarian help and medical supplies to the Russian people. He went along as co-leader and was afforded the courtesy rank of Colonel. Because World War I was in progress, the only peaceful route open to St. Petersburg involved landing on the Pacific Coast of Asia and making the long journey the breadth of what is now called the U.S.S.R. Few Americans then or today have seen the vast expanses of land, some arid or semi-arid, which the man was exposed to.

On the trip to Russia, the idea of devoting future charitable contributions to plant science research, to better utilize the plant resources of the planet for the benefit of mankind, was born. After dodging bullets in the streets of St. Petersburg, the man reflected on the causes of unrest in the world. The Germans were fighting for *lebensraum*. The Russian people were fighting for their liberty and to gain control of their ancestral natural resources which had been exploited by the Czar. After a brief political escapade in Russia, funding the shaky Kerensky government with a large sum of money, the mining man from America concluded that he had supported the losing side in the internal struggle. But his intentions had been to assist the Russian people. When the Bolshevik element came into power, he recommended to the American government that it be recognized and that humanitarian aid be funneled to the people through it. But President Wilson had a "hands-off" policy with regard to the new government, a process that was the beginning of a long-standing wedge

between peoples of the United States and Russia.

When the man came back to this country, he established non-profit charitable organizations devoted to plant science research to alleviate world hunger and to serve as permanent influences to educate the human race with regard to using, improving and disseminating living plants for the good of all.

In arid parts of Asia, the man was impressed with the uses that people made of the barely adequate natural vegetation. He vowed then to get at the roots of human misery and suffering in arid lands. The thought came to him of setting up an arid-land arboretum in which to assemble and catalog dry country plants and inventory their uses. Such an institution would serve as a living depository for germplasm which would be made more available for utilization throughout the world. It would be an educational institution to help instill in mankind a better appreciation for plants. It would actively engage in research on desert plants and would make the results available to mankind the world over.

The man's life is told in the book *The Magnate* by Hermann Hagedorn, published recently in paper-back form at \$4.95 by the Boyce Thompson Southwestern Arboretum, one of the two plant science institutions that the man established. The other institution is presently located on the campus of Cornell University at Ithaca, New York, and was established as the Boyce Thompson Institute for Plant Research. Dr. Roy A. Young, formerly Chancellor of the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, is the Managing Director. The Institute has researched the inner workings of plants, their chemistry and physiology, as well as their relations with the environment. And always the mission of the two institutions has been to improve the lot of mankind at the very basic level, that relating to plant life. William Boyce Thompson had a talent for identifying valuable natural resources. He knew that only plants could make sugar from air and water and that the future of mankind depends on that fact.