

# obituary

ANNIE FRANCÉ-HARRAR

The first person to investigate the micropopulations of healthy farm soils was Raoul Francé. In 1912 he coined the term 'edaphon' to describe the area of soil science in which he had been working since 1906. This was the time when agriculture chemists regarded the soil as no more than an inert substrate for their mineral fertilisers, whose triumphs had been well

established. Nowadays these triumphs are coming to be seen as more and more deceptive, as they lead to soil erosion, deficiency diseases and, in their wake, the pesticides that have poisoned our environment irreversibly. In 1943 Francé died prematurely. Since 1916 his colleague, and later his wife, had been Annie Francé-Harrar. She carried on with his work. On the 23rd. January, 1971, she died at the age of 85. From when

she was 65 until she was 74, she worked in Mexico, bringing exhausted, infertile soils back to life by the use of compost. She wrote a long list of books, her main ones being HUMUS (1957) and THE LAST CHANCE (Die Letzte Chance)(1950), both published by Bavarian Agricultural Publishers, and both now out of print. Her HANDBOOK OF SOIL LIFE (Handbuch des Bodenlebens), with some 40 hand drawn colour illustrations of micro-organisms from various soils, is still unpublished. This work deserves wider recognition. THE LAST CHANCE is a mine of information about soil science written for the general reader. Other cultures throughout history, from Babylon and Egypt to Rome, have risen and fallen, their fortunes being related to the condition of their soils and dependent on the care for or neglect of the land. There is a lesson here for our own time, when for the first time man is beginning to understand the protection of the environment. It would be most desirable for a publisher to salvage these sunken treasures and bring out at least a posthumous edition that would be of the greatest importance in bringing them to a wider readership.

In her biography, which is to be published shortly, it says: 'There would be no world hunger if man were to re-establish the natural cycles that he has been breaking for so long'.

DR. EBERHARD SPOHN

