WHAT IS THE VALUE OF THE USUAL LABORATORY WORK GIVEN IN GENERAL SOILS COURSES?²

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In connection with a study of the soils courses outlined in the catalogs of a number of the State agricultural colleges, attention has been directed to the nature and value of the usual laboratory work given as a part of the first or general soils courses. There is no question as to the value of this work to the small number of men who will later specialize in investigational or teaching work in soils or very closely related lines. It must be kept in mind, however, that these are required courses in most colleges, and even where they are not, are taken by practically all men finishing undergraduate work. There is a question, it would seem, as to the value of this work compared with other courses which might be taken, to the large number of men who will not thus later specialize.

Only a very small part of the laboratory work in soils is that in which the average student is gaining a knowledge and something of the art of doing operations which he will be using in post-graduation activity. In this respect the soils work differs from the laboratory work in such courses as stock-judging, farm mechanics, and the first courses in dairy husbandry and in horticulture, in that here the student is going thru operations which will be common to his post-graduation activity and with which previous to his class work he was more or less unfamiliar; and it is in this relation to post-graduation activity that the value of these courses must be mainly found. Laboratory work in soils to be of a similar nature in this respect would have to include such practices as the plowing and preparation of land, the application of fertilizers, etc. It is obvious why work of this nature is not given. It is either not adaptable to laboratory conditions, or else constitutes such a common part of farm practice that students are familiar with it before entering college.

From the standpoint of mental discipline, the usual laboratory work in connection with soils courses takes at least equal rank with that given in connection with other courses in agriculture, but this qualification alone does not constitute a justification for the work. From this standpoint alone not only this work but most of the courses

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