BOOK REVIEWS

SOIL AND CIVILIZATION

(A Modern Concept of the Soil and the Historical Development of Agriculture)


This book is one which will prove of large interest and value not only to soils workers everywhere, but also to all those who are interested in agriculture. While written in a popular style, as one of a series of books in the Library of Modern Sciences, scientific terminology has been followed to a large extent and it is mainly the illustrative discussions which have been couched in a style to attract and interest the lay reader. The need of popularizing soil science is well recognized and this book should do much toward bringing about a general understanding and appreciation of the importance and value of soils investigations.

The book presents clearly, definitely, and popularly, the modern concept of soil “as a living organized thing with properties and functions which react on each other as is common with organized beings.” It emphasizes the fact that soil is dynamic and “functions internally in much the same way as the higher order of animals.”

The chapter on the important soils of the United States is based on the soil survey work of the Federal Bureau of Soils and presents an excellent summary of the characteristics of the more important soil series which have been established in the different provinces of the country.

Methods of soil control are considered briefly and the role of fertilizers is discussed at length in a separate chapter. Here the author has given a rather extensive review of the early work with fertilizers, tracing the development of theories as to fertilizer action and reaching the conclusion that it “seems a narrow view to take in calling fertilizer constituents plant foods, as their action and effect is far broader than the narrow interpretation usually ascribed to a food product.” He urges that we recognize the “significance of the biochemic factors of the digestive system of the soil.”

The chapters on “The Beginnings of Organized Agriculture” and “Agriculture in the Countries of the World” are delightful and the material presented will prove of historical value in connection with many soils investigations. As a conclusion, emphasis is placed upon the importance of handling soils in such a way that they may be made more productive and kept in a high state of fertility. Farmers are urged to study their soils, experiment with various treatments and keep in touch with the results of soils investigations so that they may promptly put into practice those things which are discovered.

The renaissance of agriculture since the sixteenth century is considered briefly and in the final chapter on “What of the future” the author presents the optimistic viewpoint that with the knowledge already secured, with the increase which is constantly taking place,