THE MYSTERY OF THE SOIL

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"Nature in the raw" may be seldom "mild," but mild or harsh, it has always been a deep-dark mystery to the limited intellect of mankind. The ancients reverenced everything which was mysterious to them, believing that "the gods" were responsible. They feared to attempt an examination of any of the things which mystified them lest "the gods" be angry and visit their wrath upon the rash, presumptuous investigator. Hence it was that the multitude of natural phenomena which forced themselves upon the attention of those primitive people were awe-inspiring and interesting, but not at all understood and, indeed, not even the subject of investigation! Nature was accepted as it was—the gift of the gods and under the control of the gods! The only thing necessary was to keep the gods properly propitiated and everything would be lovely!

This calm, comfortable philosophy of the "early settlers" was gradually replaced by the "inquiring mind" of the beginnings of so-called civilization. The gods were often difficult to conciliate and in spite of all manner of sacrifices, things did not always go right. Certain individuals became so curious that they braved the wrath of the gods and delved into the various mysteries. And lo!—nothing happened to them! The wrath of the gods became a thing to be mocked and ignored! And so investigational work began! Soon the physical sciences appeared and gave their aid toward the solution of nature's mysteries. Civilization developed, science developed, research developed! Or as some would have it, research began, science appeared and as a result civilization progressed! Perhaps so! At any rate many of the former mysterious occurrences were soon "exposed."

1Presidential address delivered before the twenty-fifth annual meeting of the Society held in Washington, D. C., November 17, 1932.

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