POSSIBLY as good an approach as any to this topic would be to define the words, “soil” and “scientist,” in order that we may know who it is that is looking ahead and at what he is looking.

Some years ago I learned the original meaning of the word “soil” by a peculiarly circuitous route. Having finished some work which I had been doing in Berlin, I decided to return home by way of Russia. In order to obtain permission to enter that country it was necessary to supply the proper credentials. These credentials recorded, among other facts, that I was a Professor of Soils. This title was duly translated into Russian and, when the permit was finally granted me, had been retranslated into English. From this permit I learned that I was a “Professor of the Bottom.” This last word is a literal translation of the Latin solutum, from which the English word, “soil” is believed, by some authorities, to have been derived.

Before going to the bottom of this subject, I would like to remind you that the word “science” had its origin in the Latin scire, meaning “to know.” But a clearer idea can be obtained of what science should mean to those of us who deal with the soil, and of what the soil scientist’s obligation to society consists, by reading what my dictionary says on this subject. I quote:

“Science does not, like the mechanic arts, make production its chief aim, yet its possible productive application in the arts is a constant stimulus to scientific investigation; the science, as in the case of chemistry or electricity, is urged on to higher development by the demands of the art, while the art is perfected by the advance of the science.”

Soil science has for its specific task the development of more exact knowledge about the soil to the end that more effective use shall be made of it. Now there are a great variety of uses to which soil may be put. I would welcome into our fellowship the scientist who thinks of soil as an economic asset; the scientist whose primary concern with the soil is as a foundation material for highways; the scientist who is interested in soil separates as employed in the ceramic arts; the scientist who views soil as a natural resource to be conserved; the scientist whose problem is that of fitting the soil to the plant, or the plant to the soil; and the scientist who dwells on the land and uses it as a direct means of making a living.

But, for the purpose of this discussion; I propose to confine my attention to those whose primary concern with the soil is, in some manner, related to its agricultural use, and to limit myself still further by including only those who make their living off the soil, rather than on it. I am thinking of those technically trained men

1Journal series paper of the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station, Department of Soils. Presented before the general session of the American Society of Agronomy at the 34th annual meeting held in Washington, D.C., November 13, 1941.
2Head of Department.