THE object of the American Society of Agronomy, as expressed in its Constitution, is to increase and disseminate the knowledge of soils and field crops. A glance at our program this year will indicate how diverse these problems have become. We have within our membership practically all of the leading soil scientists of America—men skilled in all phases of this complex science, which is basic to all agriculture.

The responsibilities of the soil scientist and his importance in our national life is obvious to all who take time to stop and to think. These responsibilities are especially great because this group, probably to a greater extent than any other, must supply the technical guidance regarding the utilization of our soil resources which will result in the most economic production of the crops required now and at the same time maintain their productivity so that the future of our children is secure. The goal of this group is well stated in the title of the book which has exerted so much influence on the thinking of a generation of agriculturists, Cyril J. Hopkins’ “Soil Fertility and Permanent Agriculture.” A short sojourn into areas of badly depleted soils either at home or abroad will awaken in the mind of any observant, thinking man the weight of the responsibility and the opportunity for service which lies ahead of the soil scientist in the United States.

Some of you may regard this an understatement, but certainly most of you will agree that the responsibilities and opportunities, present and future, of the crop scientists are almost as great. In this group are to be found the men who have the technical skills necessary for the development of improved strains of many of our most important crops—corn, cotton, wheat, oats, barley, hay, pasture, etc.—and the men skilled in the other techniques necessary for their efficient production. It would, perhaps, be simpler to approach the subject of the scope of our responsibilities from the other direction and ask, “If you take all the agronomy, all the soils, and all the farm crops out of agriculture, what do you have left?” I think I have said enough to at least convince us of our importance and of the broad scope of our responsibilities in both the present and the future of our country.

I would like to have you consider next the vertical scope of our responsibilities. To date we have been concerned primarily with research, resident teaching at the college level, and extension. We have been accused of being primarily a rather academic organization. The time has come for us to ask ourselves whether we want to remain such or whether we can serve society better by extending our activities into areas which up until now we have not seriously cultivated.

1Presented at the annual meeting of the Society in Columbus, Ohio, February 28, 1946.
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