Book Reviews

THE SOIL AND HEALTH: A STUDY OF ORGANIC AGRICULTURE


In this book Howard reiterates and expands his views on agriculture set forth in An Agricultural Testament. It is much the same blend of personal experience and theory as a back fence conversation and with the same chatty disorganization. The language is stronger, the mood of the author more severe, but the reasoning less rigorous than in the previous book. The rather biting critique of the "scientific" approach to agriculture, loses much of its effectiveness against the lack of rigor and the bias in the author's development of his principal thesis. His outline of the spread of the Indore process into general agricultural practice is good.

In general the thesis is the same as the Testament: All material taken from the soil must ultimately be returned to the soil. The use of "poisonous artificials" to make up for our failure to obey this "Law of Return" leads to disease and ultimately to the complete destruction of agriculture. The author amplifies his theory that mycorrhizal association is a dominant factor in plant nutrition. Also, the hypothesis that disease is a manifestation of malnutrition is reiterated. The corollary that insect, fungi, or virus associated with the disease are indicators of the disease rather than the causative agents is still unconvincing. The inclusion of McDonagh's fanciful theory of climate-actuated pulsations in relation to the nature of disease seriously detracts from rather than contributes to the author's hypothesis.

That the return of wastes to the land, the maintenance of soil organic matter, and the improvement of nutritive levels are major agricultural problems is not to be denied. That the relation of soil to health is real and needs careful, unbiased evaluation and comprehensive study is generally accepted. Howard, with his frequent cry of vested interest, his unwarranted accusation of cowardice to face trial with the compost hypothesis, is neither unbiased in his evaluation nor comprehensive in his study.—C. Stafford Brandt.

COLONIAL AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION


The author, who for many years has been in close contact with problems pertaining to the development of colonial agriculture, discusses the relative merits and shortcomings of the plantation versus peasant systems of agricultural production. To do this he uses as examples the Netherlands Indies, Malaya, Ceylon, Mauritius, Fiji, the West Indies, the Tropical African Dependencies, and the British Central and East African Dependencies. The history of the development of agriculture in each of these regions is briefly traced...