The Fifth International Congress of Soil Science was held in central Africa this past summer (1954). During the last 30 years several full congresses and many commission meetings of the International Society were held in temperate regions. We went to the Tropics this year partly in recognition of the rapidly growing importance of tropical soils and agriculture, and partly in fairness to the large membership of the Society residing and working in the Tropics.

The holding of this congress in the Tropics was made possible through the courtesy of the government of Belgium, of the local government of the Belgian Congo, and of the Administration of the INEAC. (Institute National pour l’Etude Agronomique du Congo Belge). The president of the Society for this meeting was Professor Dr. R. Tavernier of the University of Ghent. For president of the congress in Leopoldville we were fortunate to have Mr. F. Jurion, Director-General of the INEAC. Because of Mr. Jurion’s great prestige within the Congo, the organizing committee had excellent cooperation from city governments and other organizations, both public and private. Without this help the programs could hardly have been possible. Especially, did many of the professional people in the INEAC devote a great deal of time and effort to organizing the programs and in conducting the tours and demonstrations.

In all, about 219 soil scientists attended the congress from some 38 countries or semi-autonomous dependencies. Nine members of our Soil Science Society of America were there and three other Americans. I had hoped that more Americans could have gone.

As might be expected, many of those who attended are directly concerned in one way or another with tropical soils. The areas south of the Sahara in Africa especially were well represented.

Although considerable new research dealing with plant nutrition and soil fertility has been started in the Tropics, I think most will agree that much more is needed. Certainly, we can expect considerably unlike those for temperate regions. For example, I see no reason to suppose that all recommendations to tropical farmers about lime and fertilizers will be like those we make to farmers here. Important leads can probably be had through more intensive studies of the reasons for the good effects of forest fallow on most crops and soils.

Variety of Soils

Besides the contrasts in character of tropical soils and those of temperate regions, another great complication in the Tropics is the enormous number of kinds of soil. Many of the mineral materials making up the soils have been strongly weathered since the days when the parent rocks were first exposed to weathering. And, during the whole process of weathering and soil formation, there have been many drastic changes in climate and vegetation, with catastrophic changes in the landscape. It may surprise some to know that a large part of these drastic changes occurred in fairly recent geological time.

In this Congress the work in soil morphology and classification probably had a larger emphasis than in many others. This may be expected when we realize that scientific agriculture is only beginning in many of these tropical areas.

I should like to pause here to comment on the well-known failure of the large peanut scheme in British East Africa. At the time this failed I felt very unhappy about it. I felt that it was giving Africa and African soils a “black eye” unnecessarily. The failures could have been avoided through the application of well-known methods for soil examination and research. But now I think the failure of the scheme, or rather the enormous publicity about its failure, has been a good thing. It has thrown a scare into about every agricultural administrator in Africa. In my recent reading...