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CONTENTS

<i>The American Association for the Advancement of Science:—</i>	
<i>Micro-organisms of the Soil:</i> PROFESSOR GEORGE T. MOORE	609
<i>Plant Food in Relation to Soil Fertility:</i> PROFESSOR CYRIL G. HOPKINS	616
<i>The Fifth International Congress of Mathematicians:</i> PROFESSOR A. R. CRATHORNE ..	622
<i>The New England Geological Excursion:</i> PROFESSOR HERDMAN F. CLELAND	624
<i>The Pageant at Mount Holyoke College</i>	625
<i>Scientific Notes and News</i>	626
<i>University and Educational News</i>	631
<i>Discussion and Correspondence:—</i>	
<i>The First Use of Trinidad Pitch for Road-making:</i> DR. E. W. GUDGER. <i>The "Williams Process" of Photography:</i> ROGER H. WILLIAMS	632
<i>Scientific Books:—</i>	
<i>Heredity and Eugenics:</i> PROFESSOR LEON J. COLE. <i>Browne's Handbook of Sugar Analysis:</i> DR. F. G. WIECHMANN. <i>Gratacap's Popular Guide to Minerals:</i> PROFESSOR W. E. FORD	634
<i>Special Articles:—</i>	
<i>Antagonistic Action of Electrolytes and Permeability of the Cell Membrane:</i> PROFESSOR JACQUES LOEB. <i>Vital Staining of Chromosomes and the Function and Structure of the Nucleus:</i> DRS. G. L. KITE and ROBERT CHAMBERS, JR. <i>Experiments with Desiccated Thyroid, Thymus and Suprarenals:</i> DR. F. E. CHIDESTER. <i>Newly Discovered Eurypterids in Nebraska:</i> PROFESSOR ERWIN H. BARBOUR. <i>Some Necessary Changes in Cephalopod Nomenclature:</i> S. S. BERRY	637
<i>Societies and Academies:—</i>	
<i>The Anthropological Society of Washington</i> ..	646

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THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE

MICROORGANISMS OF THE SOIL¹

SUCH statements as "the soil is not a mere sponge, but is teeming with life" or that "the earth is one of nature's vast laboratories in which microscopical wonder-workers perform incredible experiments" may have been unusual enough at one time to attract attention; but no longer is the presence or performances of these inhabitants of the soil of such novelty as to startle or dismay us. Indeed so accustomed have we become to the idea that each gram of the upper layers of the earth is filled with its millions or billions of bacteria, that the tendency is to ascribe all functions of the soil to its micro-flora and no theory is too bizarre, no miracle too improbable, so long as we may fall back upon the soil bacteria to account for it.

The apologetic statement only a short while ago of a German investigator, that perhaps, after all, the chemical condition of the soil might have almost as much to do with a given condition as the bacteria, illustrates, if nothing else, the great changes that have taken place in our conception of the constitution of the earth's surface during the last twenty years. To attempt to indicate the relative places of the various aspects of science which are concerned in problems of the soil would be as useless as it is impossible, but I might as well say at once that I do not feel that the situation calls for any particular glorification of the biologist. I do not wish to

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