

INTRODUCTION.

It is not proposed here to discuss the necessity or otherwise of organic manures. Hitherto their value has remained unchallenged and the recent evidence that sugar cane can thrive on 'artificial' alone was somewhat unexpected. It is, however, an isolated instance and has yet to withstand the test of time. For the present at any rate the periodic replenishment of soil humus may be considered an integral part of good cultural policy, and its intrinsic properties seem likely to insist that it shall remain so.

Of the many methods by which organic matter is added to the soil none is possible of universal adoption - being subject to the dictates of local conditions. In many districts the enforced scarcity of stock may eliminate the possibility of farmyard manure. Similarly the practice of green-manuring is of necessity confined to areas of adequate and distributed rainfall. Throughout a large part of the tropics the problem is evaded by the system of 'shifting cultivation', - a system generally condemned on account of the gradual soil-impoverishment which it entails. Though at present unlikely to supplant a satisfactory source of organic manure, it is in the provision of an alternative or additional supply that composting might assist the solution of these difficulties.

Composting is comparatively new to western agriculture though it has been successfully practiced for centuries in China. The present development in the west emanated from the introduction of 'Adco' and was stimulated by the mechanisation of farming and consequent shortage of farmyard manure. So far comparatively little has been accomplished in the tropics.



It is frequently suggested that the process is particularly adaptable to the tropics on account of the favourable temperature and common abundance of vegetative growth. There are, however, practical difficulties which become intensified in these countries and which may well account for the indifferent success so far achieved.