



THE ABUSE OF THE SOIL,
VELD AND WATER RESOURCES
OF SOUTH AFRICA

BY

DR. J. C. FICK

an Interests Group Publication

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PREFACE

(By the SOUTH AFRICAN INTERESTS GROUP)

When the psalmist sang "The Earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof" he echoed the thanksgiving of a people who had suffered long in the desert. Among the primitive people the direct relationship between the richness of the earth and the well-being of man had not been obscured as it has by the refinements of modern civilization. They knew that their meat, their bread, their milk and their wine were of the soil—and indirectly their clothing too. But they did not know, as we now know, that the very wilderness in which they had wandered had been fertile until, by the ignorance or the indolence of man, it was given over to a waste of sand.

South Africa lives on a layer of soil, the average depth of which is probably not more than eighteen inches in the farm lands and of course much less in the vast mountain tracts. There is no margin for waste. Yet every year and for many years past tons of soil and wide stretches of fertile land have been, and still are, lost through the mistakes or the neglect of those who have most need to conserve it. For long this passed almost unnoticed except by the few who without thought or prospect of personal reward and with a devotion, proof against repeated disappointments, have pointed the danger ahead and sought out its causes and remedies. One of these is Dr. Fick, whose treatise on soil erosion the South African Interests Group is privileged to publish. He and his colleagues in the Department of Agriculture have recently found a powerful ally in the Veld Trust, and at last there is a quickening of interest in South Africa's most vital problem.

If it were feasible by Act of Parliament to prohibit the process by which furrows become ditches and ditches dongas, the problem might be left to the Government to settle. But the most that any Government can do is to make the method known and the means available to combat erosion, and possibly enforce some elementary safeguards by occupiers of land. Nor is this a problem which affects only the farmer as all depend on the soil, all are concerned in its preservation.

The real and effective remedy is a national crusade bringing the truth home so vividly and so personally to every South African that his whole strength will be bent to save earth, the eternal mother, from this continued neglect and injury. Her face is already scarred, her strength sapped, but there is still time to heal and restore, lest we are finally brought to mourn in Milton's words :

“Earth felt the wound ; and Nature from her seat
Sighing in all her works, gave sign of woe
That all was lost.”