

CHAPTER V

SULPHUR AND THE SULPHIDES

THE fundamental importance of sulphur has already been stated. Without sulphuric acid our whole chemical industry would be impossible, and to make that acid either native sulphur, or the element combined with one of the metals, is required. In an experimental way and to a limited extent the acid has been made by breaking down gypsum, and it is possible that at some future time that material may become an important source of supply; but so far as present knowledge goes, it is impossible to make acid by this process in quantity and at competitive costs.

The world's market for sulphur is now mainly supplied from the wells in Texas, supplemented by sulphur mined from sedimentary beds in Sicily and that derived from treating sulphide ores of the various metals, particularly the iron-copper pyrite from southern Spain. Locally, sulphur is won from solfataras in volcanic regions, but such sources are not generally able to compete on a price basis with the others already mentioned. In the Far East, the main known sources of sulphur are in the volcanic regions of Japan, the Netherlands East Indies, and to a minor extent in the Philippine Islands. Large bodies of pyrite, such as are mined in the Mediterranean region, have not been found nor are there any known major deposits of sulphides of the other minerals such as occur in the United States, Canada, Australia and elsewhere, from which a by-product supply may be expected. In none of the Far Eastern countries except Japan do domestic supplies of sulphur seem to be large enough to support a major transformation of industry, and in Japan the necessary supply would only be available at a material handicap in cost.

JAPAN

In Japan, sulphur is widely distributed, being found in and around the numerous volcanic peaks from Hokkaido to