

THE STUDY OF TROPICAL FORESTS

Dr. H. N. WHITFORD in a recent private letter from Manila announces the publication of a work on "The Composition and Volume of the Dipterocarp Forests of the Philippine Islands." This volume is issued by the Forestry Bureau of the Philippine Islands and represents several years of active field work by its author. The magnitude and financial value of these forests are strikingly shown by a single quotation:

Our virgin forest area comprises 25,000,000 acres and has 200 billion board feet of timber standing on it. This is a good showing when compared with the 400 billion feet of timber on the 200,000,000 acres of the United States forest reserves.

Dr. Whitford is now at work on a larger and more complete monograph on "The Forests and Principal Forest Trees of the Philippines," which will be a much more extended treatise.

The success of the forestry work done by our forestry service in the Philippines has won the approval and admiration of all the governments interested in tropical forests. The *Cable-News American* of Manila of February 10, 1910, compliments Major George P. Ahern, director of forestry of the Philippine Islands, and relates that Dr. Treub, former director of the Botanical Gardens of Java, has sent a man to Manila to study the American forestry methods. The Inspector General of Exploration of Portuguese East Africa has written asking Major Ahern if he can send two experts to organize a similar survey for the African forests. Major Ahern in replying states some facts that will be of interest to Americans in general.

The Bureau of Forestry has had the difficult task of investigating, protecting and developing the enormous forest areas of the islands without adequate men and funds for carrying on the work. In spite of these difficulties, however, most of the forests have been classified, estimated and mapped, and we now know what the forests of the Philippines contain, where and how the different forest types are situated, and the approximate cost of placing their lumber on the market.

The forest wealth of the Philippines is found

most largely, not in the high-priced cabinet woods (although when considered alone their value is very large), but chiefly in the stands of cheaper structural timbers, such as may be used for most purposes in place of Oregon pine and Baltic fir and other similar timbers in Europe and America. This is distinctly advantageous, although it is contrary to the general idea of the composition of tropical forests. The value of the timber is further increased by the fact that the structural species often occur in almost pure stands and in large quantities, making their logging by modern steam methods comparatively simple and economical.

I believe that the structural possibilities of tropical forests have been decidedly underrated, and that an investigation of other countries besides the Philippines will show large bodies of timber that can be lumbered cheaply and used for general construction purposes, for which there is always a large and steady demand.

Major Ahern says frankly:

Of all the men who under my direction have had charge of the forest work in the Philippines, chief credit is due to two foresters for what has been accomplished. These are Dr. H. N. Whitford, chief of the Division of Investigation in this bureau, and Mr. H. M. Curran, forester in the same division.

These two men have an ambition to explore and take an inventory of tropical forests in general, the world around, and are hoping to obtain financial aid from the various countries interested, and possibly from private sources, and to organize extensively for the work. If these plans are prospered it will call for the aid of several foresters, and this should be of interest to a number of well-trained men from our American schools of forestry.

Dr. Whitford is firmly convinced that the "value of the tropical forests as a world asset is not appreciated simply because our knowledge concerning their possibilities is so limited." If his great plan can get the proper financial backing he is in a position to do a bit of pioneering and surveying that will open up to the world's commerce, immense wealth in tropical timber never dreamed of hitherto.

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