

New Light on Tropical Forests

Timber Region of Amazon Basin of South America Three Times as Large as U. S. Forest Area.

In announcing a new department of tropical forestry, under Dr. H. N. Whitford, Yale University has provided the following most interesting discussion of opportunities awaiting development in a field practically unknown until very recent years.

The recent development of tropical countries has focussed the attention of the world on their forest resources. The question arises, have such countries extensive forests and if so can these forests be utilized for their industrial development or will they have to depend entirely on the forest regions of Europe and North America for their main timber supplies?

Forests of the Tropics

In North America and Europe there are certain extensive forest regions that at present time furnish the main supplies of timber used in the world. There are at least two very large forest regions in the tropics. These are the Amazon region of South America and the Indo-Malay region of Southeastern Asia and adjacent islands.

The forested region of the Amazon River basin, comprising an area of 1,600,000 square miles is the largest in the world. This is three times as large as the forested area of the United States and 260,000 square miles larger than that of European and Asiatic Russia combined.

The forested area of Borneo, Sumatra, the Philippine Islands, the Malay Peninsula and Burma is roughly estimated to be not less than 500,000 square miles, or nearly as large as that of the United States.

Thus the forested area of these two tropical regions alone comprises more than 2,000,000 square miles.

Some Misconceptions

The popular conception of tropical forests is that they are only capable of producing woods chiefly valuable for cabinet purposes, for dyes and extracts, or for special uses requiring extreme hardness and durability. This is due to the fact that only this class of material can be marketed in temperate regions without competition with native woods and until recently could not be marketed for home consumption because of the high cost of lumbering due to primitive and expensive methods of logging and milling. For example, the Philippines formerly consumed the hard, durable woods mainly, and depended largely on outside sources for cheap construction woods. Investigation showed that the great bulk of the woods of the forests consisted of soft and medium hard woods suitable for the same general construction purposes as Douglas fir, the chief imported wood. Modern methods of logging and milling were introduced and thus the cost of manufacture reduced so that today the Philippines are not only supplying their own wants but are rapidly forging ahead toward becoming an exporting country.

The impetus given to the lumber industry in the Philippine Islands has spread to parts of Borneo and Sumatra where modern methods of lumbering are being introduced.

Recent investigations in South America show that their forests besides containing hard and durable woods, have a much larger percentage of soft and medium hard woods that