

Greece Pays Penalty of Deforestation

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*"Infertile sand and dreary rock
waste remain" as legacy of
the golden age*



THE history of Greece has been so unfortunate and political conditions so unsettled that only lately efforts at improvement in economic conditions could hope to receive attention. For centuries after Greece had become a Roman province (146 B.C.) it changed rulers, Romans, Byzantines, Franks, Venetians, following each other, until between 1460 and 1473, it came under the Turkish yoke. As a result of an insurrection started in 1821, freedom, but no settled order as yet, was attained in 1829 through the assistance of Great Britain, France and Russia.

By the time this new era had arrived there was probably little valuable forest worthy of the name left, except in the inaccessible mountain districts.

Forest Conditions.

Although certain districts, like Attica, were already practically denuded in Plato's time, there is little doubt that originally the whole of Greece with small exceptions was a continuous forest. The destruction of the forest, protected by thousands of gods and nymphs in holy groves, proceeded slowly under the regime of the ancient Greeks, until the fanaticism of the Christian religion led to a war against these pagan strongholds, and the holy groves were reduced by axe and fire. Turkish misrule for centuries, over-taxation, reckless cutting, extensive herding of goats and sheep, and fires have reduced the forest area until now it occupies only 12 or 14 per cent. of the land area (25,000 square miles). In 1854, a survey developed about 2 million acres of wood-

lands (probably an excessive figure) for the now 2.5 million people, while 67 per cent. of the surface is a useless waste, and only 20 per cent. under cultivation, so that the general aspect of the country is desolate. The many islands are entirely deforested, and so are the seashores.

"Where in olden times dense shade poplars stood, now only infertile sand and dreary rock waste remain."

The forest in northern and middle Greece is confined to the two rugged mountain ranges with numerous spurs which run parallel, north and south, with Mt. Olympus (nearly 9,000 feet) and Mt. Pindus (6,000 feet) the highest elevations. The large fertile plains of Thessaly and Boeotia are forestless. So is the large Arcadian plateau of the Peloponnesus, and the other smaller, hot but fertile plains and plateaus. The most valuable conifer forest is found on the higher ranges between the 2,500 and 5,000 foot level, below the snow-clad mountain tops, where especially two species of fir, *Abies Apollinis* and *Abies reginae Amaliae* (a species remarkable for its sprouting habit), with other firs and several species of Juniperus and Cupressus, form sometimes extensive forests. Other common trees are chestnut, sycamore, several species of oak and poplar, and, on the coast, *Pinus halepensis*.

The firs occupy about 35 per cent. of the forest area, oaks and deciduous forest 45 per cent. Among the forest products which are exported, we find galls, vermillion and sumach prominent.