

MOVING-UP DAY ADDRESS*

Were I to follow the practice commonly observed by speakers on occasions such as this one, all I would have to do would be to recite a few select lines praising you for the happy ending of your college work. Of course, you are all entitled to congratulations, which I give you most cordially. But if now I wish to express a word of encomium, which you certainly deserve, it is not for your having completed an academic course, but because you have chosen a career which requires self-denial, sacrifice, and strong devotion to duty on your part, if your service is to be effective and fruitful.

You will be facing a task of gigantic proportions, a continuous and an endless task. Together with the foresters now in the field, you will be called upon to take care of eighteen million hectares of forests and timber land, whose estimated value reaches fifty billion pesos. Yours will not be a guardianship in the narrow meaning of the term. Yours is an undertaking of great significance. Its purpose is not merely to preserve a precious heritage, as would be the case of a sacred but sterile family inheritance. It is very different from that. Its fundamental and imperative objective is manifold: to keep a vigilant eye on an important source of our national wealth; to make it produce richly and in abundance; to prepare it for wise exploitation; and at the same time to preserve it as a permanent asset for generations to come. In other words, to create wealth and perpetuate it.

In order to successfully solve the diverse problems that you will find in the performance of your mission, you will have to put into play all that forestry science has taught you. New difficulties have been created by war, greater needs have arisen, that will require all your ingenuity to formulate more dynamic policies to meet new conditions. Nowadays, because of the devastation produced by the last world conflict, forestry has acquired a truly international importance, comparable to that of the production of tin or even oil. Universal recognition is given to its positive role in the world's economy. Thus we see that the United Nations, through the instrumentality of the FAO, has recently organized a conference on forestry and timber utilization in order to consider the critical fuelwood and housing needs in practically all the countries of the Far East.

The forest is and has always been essential to the economic stability of a country. If its preservation and development mean national prosperity and welfare, its neglect will spell disaster and misery. A case in point is Spain. There I have seen wide areas completely denuded of trees, pitifully barren and dry. And now she is suffering from the pernicious effects of the lack of foresight of her government and people in the past. We are fortunate that two scores and fourteen years ago an agency was created and entrusted with the responsibility of preserving one of the richest gifts with which our islands have been endowed by Nature. Despite the inadequacy of the means placed at its disposal, notwithstanding the insufficient initial training and number of its personnel, our Bureau of Forestry has done much creditable work.

But the importance of our forests does not simply lie in the products that they yield. They also serve to protect a great deal of the wildlife of the nation and furnish a proper

* Address delivered at the Twelfth Moving-Up Day program of the College of Forestry, U.P. on Mar. 21, 1954 by the Hon. Manuel C. Briones, Pres. Pro Tempore, Philippine Senate.

setting for our national parks. In this present age when efforts are exerted in finding ways and means to lengthen the life span of man, wildlife provides necessary health and recreational opportunities and national parks stimulate our sense of beauty and help enrich our lives. They furnish avenues for a better utilization of our leisure. They attract tourists who are in search of the natural beauty of our country and of the scenic spots that make travel a pleasant adventure. The biological and scientific values of wildlife have been shown in the control of insect pests, the preservation of useful birds and animals, and the improvement of healthful living and sanitation. It is because of these facts that the Congress of the Philippines approved a law creating the Commission on Parks and Wildlife. But the purposes of this law would be seriously impaired if our forests and timberlands should be neglected.

It is true that the then small size of our population and the natural tendency of farmers to direct their eyes toward areas easier to develop, such as the abundant fertile plains and valleys, were mainly responsible for the present state of conservation of our still immense forest zones. Except in limited sections, they were still beyond the reach of the thoughtless activity of the "kaingineros." But the difficulties and hazards which foresters and rangers had to face in carrying out their duties were nonetheless exacting. Aside from the destructive operation of the forces or elements of nature, another detrimental factor had to be overcome: the carelessness of many and their ignorance regarding the paramount importance of not wasting our timber resource. It is gratifying to observe, however, that well informed opinion points with a sense of legitimate satisfaction and pride to the accomplishments of our foresters in their vigilant administration of our forest reserves.

The need for the development and utilization of our timber resources is now more compelling than ever. This is due not only to the growing demands of domestic consumption and the dearth of our dollar reserves, but also to requirements from abroad. The prospects, from the viewpoint of our industry, are very encouraging. Orders are coming not only from nearby markets in Asia. Even the United States of America, a great timber producer, has recently become an importer of forest products.

I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to give expression to a feeling, rather a conviction, which I have long entertained. I believe that our Government has been sadly negligent in the matter of following up energetically the good work started half a century ago. It has left the Bureau of Forestry to function without adequate aid, an attitude which is far from being commendable, to say the least. The expansion of the public services rendered by the Bureau calls for more operating funds. But the Administration has not only failed to increase the amount needed to operate the Bureau in a manner compatible with the general need of larger revenues, but has lately reduced its personnel. The present appropriation for that Office is meager and is out of proportion to its importance as a money-producing instrumentality, considering that, aside from the amounts the government receives from indirect taxes on forest dependent industries, the forests bring to the public coffers an annual income of six million pesos. This condition stands in glaring contrast with certain government-owned enterprises which have been merely wasting the people's money.

Our forest officers are among the most neglected public servants. A great many of us fail to appreciate fully the value of their services and the benefits that the country derives therefrom. The public is not aware of the dangers they face as they move through ravines and over mountains performing their duty. Because their work lacks the glitter and glamour of the white-collar employments, they do not arouse public sympathy or interest

enough to secure an improvement of their lot. Forestry service includes protection of soil and watershed, a function as far reaching in importance as forest conservation. I consider it urgent to bring it to public notice and comprehension. It must be appreciated, improved and extended if we want our forests to yield the greatest possible measure of usefulness.

It is my purpose to do whatever I can in the way of securing immediate attention and support to the all-important function of the Bureau of Forestry. This Bureau and the men under it, the guardians of one of the most essential sources of our national wealth, deserve the cooperation of the community and the government in their great task of conserving and developing one of the most priceless resources of our land.

GIVE IT A BREAK

The College of Forestry in Los Baños, which for so long has been in dire need of funds, stands to receive from the United States government a bounty of ₱167,000.00. But from this happy prospect, however, only begins its trouble. For the impoverished college also faces the frustration of missing the proffered gift by June 30 if nothing is done about it.

The big sum has been set aside by the United States government under the counterpart fund agreement to meet one-half of the estimated expenses for the reconstruction and expansion of the college of forestry building. Before the sum can be released, however, the Philippine government must first appropriate its counterpart or the other half to finance the project. Otherwise, after June 30, the offer lapses.

Officials of the college have made representations with the head of the University regarding the matter. But unfortunately, the University is not presently endowed to foot the counterpart.

It is, therefore, crystal clear that the college officials are left with one last recourse—to petition Congress to appropriate the vital counterpart. Or be left twiddling just the empty sack.

The Honorable director of the bureau of forestry, who is ex-officio dean of the college, must be able to do something about the matter. If he is not yet in patting terms with majority of the legislators, a representation perhaps with Mr. Magsaysay would turn the tide for the college, considering the predilection of the President for projects that more directly touch on the foundation of our national life.

The college needs a bigger house for its congested and ever-growing enrolment. At present, it must cater not only to the frantic demand of the bureau of forestry for technical men to guard and tap our forest wealth but also to that of private enterprise in our growing forest industry.

The college must also have adequate facilities and equipment to keep up with excellence. And finances for research and experimental projects.

There is now a move by every student of the college to write his congressman for action on the desired appropriation. We should expect early action for the best. Or else, forestry students can always find in the Maquiling forest plenty of wood with which they may badger their congressmen ever after.—rt

Phil. Collegian, Feb. 4, 1954

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