

FORESTRY EDUCATION, A RETROSPECT

The status of Philippine Forestry is inseparably linked with the U.P. College of Forestry. Its being the only institution in the country, it is but natural for anyone to attribute to it whatever success forestry in the country has attained, or to blame it for its slow growth and retarded development.

According to some critics, despite its fifty-five years, forestry education in the country has been found wanting in more ways than one. They blame its sluggish pace to lack of leadership among the graduates that have left the college portals since its foundation to 1957. Because of this, they argue, forestry education has not been able to cope with the rapid economic and social changes in the country and the lamentable fact that the people for lack of forestry consciousness have been destroying our forests faster than any other people in the world.

In the face of such a charge, it is worthwhile to look back into the past. Forestry education began as early as 1910. The former school of forestry started as a small department of the U.P. College of Agriculture offering only the two-year ranger course. It was not until 1922 that the four-year curriculum leading to the degree of Bachelor of Science in Forestry was introduced. From its beginning up to 1957, the school was administered and staffed by personnel of the Bureau of Forestry, the bureau Director being its ex-officio Dean. According to law, the University and the Bureau were jointly responsible for its maintenance, the Bureau supplying most of the teaching staff, the University to look after its other needs, such as funds for additional faculty, equipment and facilities, and additional buildings for dormitories, etc. On paper, this arrangement was all right, but the University had not done its share as expected. The school was dubbed "the forgotten school" and an alumnus compared it to a pig with two masters, one depending on the other to feed it, so that in the end the poor pig died of neglect and starvation. There was a clamor then among the alumni that it be transferred to the University. The formal transfer took effect with the passage of another law in Congress. It cannot be gainsaid that the change of status had done the College some good.

According to the young critics among the present faculty members, the growth of the College under the Bureau was retarded because students' creativity and critical thinking was curtailed so that most, if not all, the students who took up forestry up to 1957 did not have a mind of their own, that they could not argue or reason out with the faculty, for fear of reprisals before or after graduation, and that they swallowed everything taught them hook, line and sinker.

We often wonder whether or not this charge laid at the door of the former faculty and the alumni from 1910 to 1957 is fair and irrefutable. We would like to ask the critics if the College that produced men, who are now holding top positions not only in wood using industries but in other enterprises also,

could be accused of cramping student's creativity and critical thinking during his student days. We wonder if the College who had two of its alumni in Congress, one Cabinet Secretary, a Member of the Board of Regents, of the State University, three directors of the Bureau of Forestry, a Reforestation Administrator, a Director of the Forest Products Research Institute, a Director of Parks and Wildlife, four Deans of the College, Consultants and Managers of well-known firms, ranking officers in the Air Force, Navy, P.C. and other law enforcing agencies, can be accused of failing to produce leaders.

Another charge is that new graduates do not know what to do once they are out in the field, that they cannot apply the principles that they learned in college to real life situations. While this state of affairs applies not only to graduates up to 1957, but also those of recent vintage, we should like to point out that this is true not only with our college, but of the other units of the university. One cannot deny the fact that book learning is not a sure guarantee that it can solve all problems that a graduate will meet in his life calling. A graduate is expected "to learn the ropes", the day he starts on his own. It can be suggested, however, that the blending of the theoretical with the practical would make it easier for the graduate to meet life's situations. As Alfred North Whitehead says, "the justification for a university's existence is that it preserves the connection between knowledge and the zest of life, by uniting the young and the old in the imaginative consideration of learning. The university imparts information, but it imparts it imaginatively." This is one phase of education that the Dean and the faculty should find worthwhile looking into, if the quality of graduates of the College has to be improved to meet the demands of wood-using and other allied industries.

In making an overall study of forestry education and its effects on the country one should not lose sight of the the various factors that either helped or hampered the efforts of the graduates in the conservation movement in the country. One should consider the attitude of the executive, legislative and judicial branches of the government towards the Bureau's efforts and uphill fight against ruthless and irresponsible forest destruction. One must take into account the difficulties and handicaps that the Dean and the faculty met and suffered in pre-war days because of lack of funds. Bright students, potential A-1 foresters shied away from the College. There were no inducements then such as the scholarships now offered in the College for intelligent and deserving students. It should be borne in mind that it was only through the aids coming from the United States and from our congress and grants from conservation-minded timber concessionaires that forestry education was given the much needed impetus it had been clamoring for all these years. With the creation of the Department of Forestry Information and with the moral and additional support from the University, we believe that forest destruction can be minimized, if not deracinated.

—A. D.