

The Birth of the Philippine Forest School

By ROY NASH, '08

In 1903 I graduated from high school in Wisconsin, went directly to the Yale Summer School at Milford, and there evidently took aim at a distant goal. For under date of September 16, 1903, George P. Ahern, Captain U.S. Infantry, Chief of Forestry Bureau, wrote: "I am very glad to learn of your desire to enter the Philippine forestry service, and hope we will have you with us before many years." Ahern was a Major by the time I sailed into Manila Bay on April 26, 1909. Next day he appointed me a forester in the Philippine service at 3,000 pesos per annum, the peso then being pegged at two to the dollar.

In June 1909, the College of Agriculture opened at Los Baños with Dr. Edwin B. Copeland as dean of the first college in what was to become the University of the Philippines. Dr. Copeland was a botanist who came out to the Bureau of Government Laboratories in 1903.

June being the end of the fiscal year the Bureau of Forestry was short of funds and the foresters called in from the field for a "Conference." Three other Yale men were there: William H. Kobbe, '04; Wm. Forsythe Sherfese, '05; and, if memory serves me, Robert Rosenbluth, '07. Dr. H. N. Whitford, an ecologist of Kansas Agricultural College and the University of Chicago, was then Chief of the Division of Investigations. From outside the bureau we received good counsel not only from Dr. Copeland but from Dr. E. D. Merrill, a systematic botanist in the Bureau of Government Laboratories—now the Institute of Science. And Dr. Fred W. Foxworthy whose

doctor's thesis at Cornell was on "The Secondary Wood of North American Conifers," likewise at that time with the Bureau of Science, destined shortly to become the outstanding wood technologist of the whole Malayan region, and long the Forest Research Officer of the Federated Malay States. But the one who dominated the conference was the man I consider the greatest tropical forester America has yet produced, a tall, lean North Carolinian trained at Cornell who at 80 is still roaming the jungle in Venezuela, Hugh Curran.

In preparation for the conference Curran assigned me the job of preparing a paper on "The Indian Forest Service and the Question of Personnel." I emphasized the fact that Dietrich Brandis and the other German foresters who organized the service in India, Schlich and Ribbentrop among them, very early found it necessary to give their native rangers some technical training, and organized the school at Dehra Dun as early as 1878, with a two years' course for deputy rangers in Hindustani. In urging that the Philippines could profit by the experience of India I was suggesting nothing new. As early as 1901 Captain Ahern, in his first report to the Secretary of War, recommended the establishment of a forest school. Gifford Pinchot, who visited the Philippines a year later, reiterated the need for a school. Dean Henry S. Graves urged it when he made a tour of inspection in 1905. And in 1907 Dr. Whitford had been sent to look into the forest training of people in neighboring parts of Asia.

As soon as money for fiscal 1910 became

available on July 1, I was sent off to a post in northern Negros. But scarcely had I hung up my hat and said good morning to my first tropical forest when an order came transferring me back to Manila. There Major Ahern informed me I was to organize a school for Philippine rangers at the new College of Agriculture in Los Baños. To assemble the first class of twenty-four I was authorized to visit principal provincial high schools throughout the Islands, talk forestry, and pick one student from each senior class. Their transportation to Los Baños would be paid, each would receive 20 pesos monthly toward board, and housing would be provided. Each student in turn agreed to work for the Bureau of Forestry for at least as long as his period of forestry schooling. One of that first class, Felix Franco, is still working for the Bureau—46 years later!

Curran and I went up to Los Baños and, after going over the ground with Dean Copeland, located the forester's cottage on a commanding elevation and chose the site for a row of student cottages at the foot of the hill; forested Mt. Makiling dominating the background, with two brooks furnishing a splendid supply of water. Construction shortly was started on the home for the resident forester and on a students' mess.

Among the twenty-four students who assembled when the forest school officially opened its doors on June 13, 1910, was one destined to become Director of Forestry and ex-officio dean of the forest school, Florencio Tamesis. In 1905, when he was sixteen or seventeen, Tamesis went to work for Kobbe as a houseboy. On field trips Kobbe correctly appraised the boy's native abilities, got him a job with the Bureau of Forestry, first as student assistant at a peso a day, then ranger. When the College of Agriculture opened in 1909 he entered with the first class and transferred to forestry the next year.

That first class on arrival found the one

large room of the mess hall to sleep in, and that was about all. Under my direction they set to and built their own cottages out of bamboo and nipa, soon had a tennis court in operation and vegetables coming up in their gardens. One creek afforded an excellent swimming pool and Mt. Makiling a field laboratory for foresters second to none. They went to the College of Agriculture for their English and mathematics; I and a series of visitors from Manila gave them their start in forestry subjects.

For family reasons I had to return to the States in the spring of 1911, so of my own knowledge I can speak only of the school's birth that first year. Donald M. Matthews of Michigan took over as resident forester when I left.

A few months later two Yale men arrived, one of whom was destined to leave his footprints all over the Philippines. Colonel Arthur F. Fischer writes from San Diego:

"L. R. Stadtmiller and I, both of the 11F class of the Yale Forester School, arrived in Manila on Occupation Day, August 13, 1911. Stadtmiller went to Mindanao and I shuttled between Manila and Los Baños getting things ready for a field trip with Curran to Northern Luzon; was stationed at Los Baños upon return early in 1912 and taught Forest Engineering. Curran and I left with the senior class for a reconnaissance of the Insular Lumber Company in 1912, when all came down with malaria.

"Don M. Matthews was in administrative charge of the school under Whitford and Dr. Copeland as dean of the College of Agriculture. In 1916 I was made Chief of Investigation and Professor of Tropical Forestry and upon separation of the School from the College in 1916 I was acting dean."

Thus modestly began an institution whose graduates have been a powerful influence on the side of conservation and sound forest management throughout the whole region from India to Japan.