

MR. RIDLEY AND FORESTRY IN MALAYA.

It is never an easy matter to assess the value of the services of a biologist in any particular field, and when the boundaries of the fields are as obscure as those that surround forestry and agriculture, differentiation becomes impossible. Nearly every issue of the official organ of the Indian Forest Service—the *Indian Forester*—contains articles on crops that nobody in this country would connect with forestry, but which are regarded as coming within the purview of the Forest Department in India. Coming nearer home there is the case of rubber. Rubber started as a forest crop, but general responsibility for government activities and experimental work was, for purposes of convenience, subsequently vested in the agricultural authorities. Are Ridley's attainments in this field to be labelled forestry or agriculture? It may be supposed that Ridley was not particularly concerned at the time with the labels on the pigeon-holes in which posterity intended to docket the records of his activities, and we do not think that he will worry a great deal now if some of them have got a bit mixed.

That he was alive to the importance of maintaining supplies of timber goes without saying, and it is to Ridley that we owe the constitution of reserves in Malacca, whose forests would have been in danger of total dissolution during the rubber boom but for his foresight. The same applies to Penang, for aesthetically spoiled though that delightful settlement may be from the clearing of hill forest, it would have been completely ruined had reservation not put a stop to the (mostly unremunerative) efforts of cultivators on the hill sides. In Singapore, the reserves are of less importance and have been virtually abandoned. When Ridley arrived the damage had already been done, and the areas available for reservation were, for the most part, already past praying for as forests, though possibly worth considering for reforestation, an aspect of forestry that loomed very much larger in the Straits when comparative ignorance prevailed with regard to the resources of the interior and communications were chiefly remarkable by their absence. Such plantations as were formed were, for the most part, confined to denuded tracts of country, and except for a patch of quite fair mahogany and some unhappy line plantings of high forest forms that continue to receive a certain amount of attention at Bukit Beruang in Malacca, little trace remains of these early efforts.

In 1895 Ridley paid a visit to Selangor and reported on the forests of that state which, at that time, were in nominal charge of the Land Officers, and it was largely due to his report that the first Forest Officer, Mr. B. H. F. Barnard was appointed in that State. He subsequently accompanied Mr. H. C. Hill, who was seconded from the Indian Forest Service to report and advise on

the forests of the F.M.S., a step which led to the appointment of Mr. A. M. Burn-Murdoch and the establishment of the Forest Department as a combined Federal and S.S. organization in 1900.

So much for his direct activities. Valuable though they undoubtedly were they were as nothing compared with his work in the field of systematic botany and plant economy. Thanks chiefly to Ridley, the Malayan forest organization was able to start off with immeasurably more knowledge of the composition of the forests than is the common lot of tropical foresters generally. Without his *Flora of the Malaya Peninsula* and *Malay Plant Names* most of our *Forest Records* would have been very incomplete or might never have been written. Though essentially a systematist he never allowed himself to be tied to the herbarium, and his contributions to the *Agricultural Bulletin* included invaluable field notes on timbers and on the uses and sources of all kinds of minor forest products. That there were inaccuracies goes without saying, but it was just that quality of recklessness in Ridley's work that enabled him to turn out such vast quantities of assimilable knowledge when it was most needed. A lesser man would have feared for his professional reputation, but Ridley was above such petty considerations. The work needed doing, and with the means at his disposal he did it magnificently.