

Obituary

MR. GEORGE FORREST

BOTANISTS and horticulturists have received with the greatest regret the news of the death of Mr. George Forrest from heart-failure, at Tengyueh, in West China, on Jan. 5. He was one of the greatest of botanical collectors, and had the good fortune to find the richest of fields for his explorations.

Forrest was born at Falkirk on March 13, 1873, and was educated at Kilmarnock Academy. As a young man he spent some years in Australia and South Africa. Returning to Scotland, he was engaged for a time on herbarium work at the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh. In 1904 came his opportunity. On behalf of Mr. A. K. Bulley, of Neston, he made the first of his journeys to western Yunnan to collect plants and seeds. From that time onwards he devoted himself, with but brief vacations, to exploration in Yunnan and the adjoining regions.

The floral richness of the provinces of western China and of eastern Tibet was long unsuspected. A foreshadowing of the botanical wealth of the area came first from the dried collections of Prof. A. Henry and from the material sent to Paris by the French missionaries such as David, Delavay, and Soulié. These noteworthy collectors did not, however, explore in any detail the higher alps of the Tibeto-Chinese frontier, nor did they forward much to Europe in the way of seeds. Consequently, the area was almost virgin country for the horticultural explorer. It was now that Wilson and Forrest, and later Kingdon Ward, Schneider, Handel-Mazzetti, and Rock, entered such a promising field. Wilson had Hupeh and Szechwan for his domain, and "Plantæ Wilsonianæ" is testimony to their botanical riches. Forrest was but a year or so later, and chose western Yunnan and the adjoining parts of Tibet and south-west Szechwan. For multiplicity of species this is the richest area in China, and has good claims to possess the finest alpine flora in the world. Forrest made no fewer than eight expeditions into these regions. The number of his dried botanical specimens exceeded 30,000. Many of the species had been found before by the French missionaries and described by Franchet at Paris; but many hundreds were new, and these specially natives of the higher altitudes between 10,000 ft. and 15,000 ft.

Forrest kept an even balance between the claims of botany and horticulture. He made it his endeavour to secure seed of all plants of horticultural merit and also of any botanical interest. His dried material forms one of the great collections, worthy of comparison with that of any previous explorer in any country. Apart from copious field notes, the material is of the very highest standard; witness the statement of a Japanese botanist, Prof. Kudo, who has just published, after fifteen years' study, a monograph on the Labiatae of eastern Asia. For that purpose he visited some forty of the chief herbaria in Europe, Asia, and America, and records

of his examination of Forrest's specimens that his collection of Chinese plants is "die beste in der Welt" (*Mem. Fac. Sc. Tôhoku Imp. Univ.*, vol. 2, No. 2).

Much of Forrest's success in this respect was due to his capacity for management of the hillmen whom he employed in his travels. These tribesmen were taught by him and became expert in the drying of herbarium material, in the collection of seeds in autumn (implying recognition of what was previously collected in flower—no easy task), and in the skinning of birds and mammals. The hillmen were particularly loyal to him, sometimes travelling six weeks to meet him when they heard he was arriving at Bhamo *en route* for the Chinese Alps. This influence extended to the tribesmen generally, as well as to all classes of Chinese in the towns and villages at lower elevations. Among other kindnesses, he was welcomed for his attempts to do what he could for them in the way of rough-and-ready 'doctoring'. He felt their needs so much that he was in the habit of procuring lymph from Burma, and in his time inoculated many thousands against smallpox. It was only on his first expedition, when feelings between Tibetans and Chinese were exacerbated, that Forrest had serious conflict. That first expedition ended in a tragedy. A large party, some eighty in all, including Forrest and two French missionaries (Père Dubernard and another), were assailed by the Tibetans, and only a bare dozen escaped massacre. Père Dubernard was brutally tortured before death, and his companion was killed on the spot. Forrest was hotly pursued for some ten days, without shelter and without food. Of his personal following of seventeen, there was only one survivor.

Though somewhat short of stature, Forrest was of very robust build and was able to endure the roughest of travelling. Unfortunately, he never gave to the world a written record of his experiences in central Asia. Few explorers could have had a more fascinating story to tell, but the task of writing it was always postponed until his days of retirement—and that time did not come. In any event, the task did not appeal to him, and it was only rarely that he could be persuaded to write for publication. His interests lay wholly in the field; his collections of the flora and fauna of the area, supplemented by accurate and very complete notes, have formed the basis of a very large number of scientific papers, while European gardens have been much enriched by the numerous plants raised from the seed secured on his various journeys.

WE regret to announce the following deaths:

Prof. W. Billington, professor of surgery in the University of Birmingham, aged fifty-six years.

Sir Arthur Duckham, president-elect of the Federation of British Industries and one of the founders of the Institution of Chemical Engineers, on Feb. 14, aged fifty-one years.