

The Institute for Research in Tropical America

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Some of you may assume, from the title of this paper, that the subject is a dry one. I can assure you that it is not, but, on the contrary, there is before us an opportunity to secure for Florida an institution which not only promises to greatly surpass any existing institution in the southern states but one which will presently attain a world-wide distinction in the field of science, including agriculture and horticulture. I will confess, at this time, that I requested your President and Secretary to afford me the opportunity of talking to you on this subject, because I honestly believe that we have something of vital interest to this Society, and that, furthermore, this Society is the logical agency to take the initial step towards getting this institution located in Florida.

Without further preliminaries, permit me to say that within recent months—practically since the close of the World War—there has developed among scientific investigators, particularly plant pathologists, a definite movement for investigations in the tropics, pertaining not only to plant diseases, but to various lines of agricultural and horticultural work. The beginning of this movement is right here in the United States. It is not merely the expression of a desire on the part of scientists to explore the tropics along

their respective lines of research, but is the crystallization of the plans and needs of many individuals and large business interests whose financial investments in tropical countries are such as to make certain lines of scientific research a vital necessity. There are many business firms in this country that have extensive holdings in the tropics and the future success of many of their ventures is dependent upon the solution of agricultural, horticultural or biological problems. It is only natural, therefore, that such a movement, virtually international in scope, should develop at this time.

There is also great need for a more complete knowledge of the trees, plants and crops of the tropical regions than is now available, to say nothing of the fact that medical men need a knowledge of many factors which concern the origin and dissemination of tropical diseases. There is also a crying need for an institution in which students may specialize in the study of tropical problems, in order to qualify themselves for employment by business interests having investments in the tropics. And it is equally desirable that there be provided, in or by the United States, in some form, an advanced educational institution wherein students from the Latin-American countries may take advantage of the large amount of bi-

ological knowledge which has been acquired by American investigators. All of which things would be directly contributory to a closer relationship between the United States and the other American countries.

The step which led up to the organization of the Institute for Research in Tropical America was the appointment, on November 5, 1920, by the National Research Council, through its Division of Biology and Agriculture, of a "Committee on Scientific Research in The Philippines and Other Tropical Countries." On November 19, 1920, this committee reported to the National Research Council that, as a result of its investigations, it had found a number of Philippine problems demanding prompt solution, most of which vitally concern and are closely identified with important commercial ventures, the headquarters of which are in the United States. One step followed another in rapid succession and "The Institute for Research in Tropical America" was formally organized on January 15, 1921. The President of the institute is Dr. A. S. Hitchcock, personally known to many of you, and the Secretary-Treasurer is Dr. G. R. Lyman of the Bureau of Plant Industry, United States Department of Agriculture.

Now, what is this Institute? It is an institution for research in tropical America and its field embraces biology in its broadest sense, including agriculture, horticulture, plant breeding, bacteriology, entomology, plant pathology, etc. It is being sponsored by and organized under the auspices of the National Research Council, a sufficient guarantee of its

earnestness of purpose and efficiency of operation.

By the way, some of you may not clearly recall what the National Research Council is. The Council was organized in 1916 to co-ordinate the research facilities of this country for work on war problems and in 1918, by executive order of the President of the United States, it was reorganized as a permanent body. Its essential purpose is the promotion of scientific research and of the application and dissemination of scientific knowledge for the benefit of the national strength and well-being. It is virtually a Congress of the leading scientists and scientific institutions of the United States—a co-ordinating clearing house for scientific knowledge. Its administrative work is provided for by a gift of five million dollars made by the Carnegie Corporation and it has secured various gifts for the support of projects which it has sponsored, including a gift, for Research Fellowships, of five hundred thousand dollars from the Rockefeller Foundation.

The membership of the Institute for Research in Tropical America is open to all Universities, Colleges, Museums, Scientific societies and even governments that are concerned with investigations in tropical countries. How will it be financed? Partially with the funds of the institutions, both educational and research, that constitute its membership; partially by the federal support of projects which the institute undertakes and in which the government is interested; and by endowments, for, be it noted, the responsible character of the institute and

its ability will justify the utmost confidence in it by those inclined to donate funds for scientific investigation. The heaviest financial backers of the institute will undoubtedly be the big American business interests having investments in Latin America. In short, the institution will be, in a sense, a super-university and a super-experiment station and its field of operations will embrace all of tropical and sub-tropical America. Have I been able to sufficiently express the big idea?

The institute will doubtless have field stations, particularly in the countries south of us, but one thing is sure, there will be a parent station bigger than all the rest which will, also, presumably be the first one established. Where is this main station—the virtual headquarters of The Institute for Tropical Research—going to be located? Nobody knows, as yet, and right here is where Florida is mightily interested. In the southern portion of this State we have conditions sufficiently tropical to permit of successfully carrying on many, very many, of the lines of investigation projected by the Institute—and there are certain self-evident advantages in having this main station under the flag of the good old U. S. A. I am satisfied that if we go at it vigorously we can convince the officials of the institute that their headquarters should be right here in Florida. This much will, I think, be comparatively easy, but we must go further. In order to get this institution we must make a definite offer in the form of land for experimental purposes and perhaps money for the erection and equipment of a building. Once these things are provided, the United

States Department of Agriculture will be free to send its various specialists to this field station to pursue their respective lines of investigation and professors and investigators from various Universities will be quick to take advantage of the laboratory facilities provided. It has been suggested that this first or main field station should be even more than a laboratory or experimental station and that it should, in fact, be also a postgraduate school of tropical agriculture and horticulture, perhaps under the auspices of the University of Florida. I need not tell you what a prestige such an arrangement would give to our own University.

I am well aware that I have said just enough so that I should say more, but this I cannot do, for the institute, while not exactly in a formative stage, is still in its infancy and detailed plans for its operations have not yet been worked out. But the institute is a reality—some sixteen or seventeen big Universities have already associated themselves with it—and it is going to be located either in some of the countries south of us, or in Florida. The question is, what are we going to do about it? Are we going to let this opportunity slip by or are we going after this lusty infant and capture it before it gets so big that it will spurn any advances we may make? It is up to the people of Florida and I know of no more appropriate agency to handle this matter than the State Horticultural Society, for there is no other organization in the State the aims and purposes of which are so closely akin of those of the Institute for Research in Tropical America. If the idea of getting this institution located in Florida appeals

to you my suggestion would be that a live committee be appointed from this Society to investigate and, with the Society's approval, take whatever steps may be necessary to induce the officials of the institute to locate their main institution in Florida.