

Review

Conifers : South African Methods of Cultivation.

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THE spectacular nature of the afforestation schemes undertaken in the southern hemisphere and particularly in South Africa are a constant source of wonder to European foresters. In spite of the remarkable results that have been achieved very little information has hitherto been available about the methods used and as a result most people have very vague and often erroneous ideas about South African forestry especially their wide spacing and heavy thinning techniques. Mr. Hiley, who is an ardent admirer of South African forestry, as a result of two visits he has made to the plantations there, has now given us a very valuable account of the work being done. As he says, in the preface to this book, South African forestry is unique. It is unconventional and at the same time rigidly standardised. Most important of all in these competitive times, the South Africans appear to be growing their timber extraordinarily economically. It is most interesting to read about the work of such remarkable men as Craib and O'Connor and to learn how the research work carried out by these people was so productive of results in an amazingly short time by any reckoning.

The main thing to be learned from a study of this book is that planting trees can be a highly profitable business if approached in the right way. There is, however, no cut and dried prescription. Every country will have to find out for itself the best methods of cultivation and thinning; the right types of land to use; the species best suited to land and climate and the markets that need to be served or created. We must admire the South Africans, however, for their ability to recognise the importance of using the right ingredients for success, namely the right trees, the right land and the right men.

Mr. Hiley has again made a notable contribution to Forestry in these islands and at a rather critical time. The forest industry now generally recognises the need for greater efficiency and is seeking by every means to lower the costs of production so that timber products will become cheaper and cheaper and thereby more competitive. The harvesting of light timber is expensive, so that silviculture must aim at the production of reasonable dimensions in thinnings and final crop timber. The South Africans have made notable advances in the field of operational efficiency in forestry in so far as the cheapening of the growing of timber is a test of such efficiency.

Mr. Hiley concludes : "There is a very strong probability that the

adoption of similar methods would greatly cheapen the growing of timber trees here. The working out of methods which are appropriate to our species, our markets, our soils and our climate will require a large amount of research". If we are to avoid the rebuke that we are not managing our plantations with professional competence we must also pay heed to this plea for enterprising experiment.

T.C.
