

# IRISH FORESTRY

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## Editorial Comment.

The Society of Irish Foresters has been founded with the prime object of promoting technical forestry, and inculcating in our people at large an appreciation of the important bearing on the national well-being of adequate reserves of timber in our woods and plantations. Admirable work in this respect has been done in Great Britain by the English and Scottish Societies, but they are naturally concerned with the many problems which they encounter in their own territories. It was considered that there was a need for a similar body in Eire, and that some medium was required through which information could be exchanged, and individual views expressed. It was, therefore, decided to publish this journal under the title of Irish Forestry, so that all who had anything to communicate which would be of benefit to forestry in general or in Eire, in particular, would have a means of making it known.

We are fortunate in having as our first patron, Mr. Thomas Derrig, who was, until recently, Minister for Lands and Forestry. Mr. Derrig has always taken a keen personal interest in the State afforestation scheme, for which he was responsible as Minister, and considerable progress was accomplished during his period of office, in spite of the restrictions imposed on normal activities by the outbreak of world war number two. It is gratifying to record that, although he has now relinquished the responsibility for the State afforestation scheme, and is now devoting his energies to the Ministry of Education, his enthusiasm has not diminished on that account.

As our first Honorary Member we are proud to welcome Mr. A. C. Forbes, whose name has long been synonymous with forestry in Ireland. He needs no introduction to our readers, and his name is well-known in the forestry world far beyond our borders. He is fully alive to our present problems in Eire, and his address at the first General Meeting, published elsewhere in this issue, demonstrates in no uncertain fashion that he is also cognisant of the conditions and developments which led up to them.

While it was generally agreed that the publication of a journal would be helpful in furthering the objects of the Society of Irish Foresters, it was felt that something more was necessary. Forestry practices and problems may be clearly stated and discussed on paper, but the acid test of all theories and methods is what can be shewn on the ground as a result of their application. Forestry is no different from any other form of human activity in that it must stand or fall by its results. Accordingly, it was decided to hold an out-door meeting in the Suir valley area. Mr. S. M. Petrie was charged with making all necessary arrangements, and a very interesting excursion was held during the early part of last June. Two of the State forests, Carrick-on-Suir and Clonmel were visited, and two private estates, Marlfield and Cahir Park, by the kind permission of the respective owners, Mr. J. Bagwell and Lt.-Col. R. B. Charteris. The programme was exceedingly varied, and ranged through the planting of different species on a wide variation of soils, practical demonstrations of thinning in young larch plantations, conversion of former oak scrub land into coniferous forest, management of woodlands formerly in private ownership, forest road making, and the inspection of ornamental woods and plantations.

It would not have been possible to examine in detail these two forests, which cover some 6,325 acres, in the short time available, and the convener might have been pardoned had he confined the itinerary to

those parts where results had been most favourable. Such a course of window dressing would have been easily possible, but would have created too optimistic an impression as to what may be expected from forestry. The wet ground in Coolishal, the upper slopes in Derrinlaur, and the impoverished and exposed sites in Kilnamack and Russelstown provided useful correctives. If for nothing else the visit to those parts was of great value in demonstrating the many perplexities the forester encounters, and how he tries to solve them, in the planting of difficult soils. It was evident that uniform success had not been attained on the poorer types, but there was much to shew what might be done, and what should be avoided. Foresters who are charged with the task of bringing the maximum amount of ground under timber bearing are bound to achieve only partial success, or even meet with failure at times. It would have been a useful object lesson, could they have been present, to those enthusiasts who advocate the acquisition of large tracts of such types of waste land for afforestation. It does not follow that, because land is practically waste in that it is of little value for anything else, it must, therefore, be capable of growing trees. It can not be denied that enthusiasm is something to be admired, and even encouraged, but it does require the counterpoise of both knowledge and experience.

The question "Why grow timber?" has frequently been asked by those who are disposed to be critical of large-scale afforestation schemes. A comprehensive answer would be far beyond the scope of a short article on the subject, and it is best approached by considering to what extent timber and its derivatives enter into our daily lives, and how far they could be done without. Furthermore, if they were not available, would it be possible to find satisfactory substitutes?

If it were asked how many of us have given a moment's thought as to how our present complex civilisation had been built up, the answer would be chastening when it was realised how few of us really do. We are all too much inclined to take things as we find them without any enquiry as to their origin, in short, to take them for granted. Yet, if any thought were given to the matter, it would be realised that man's slow development from the primeval state has been largely due to his gradual extension of his range of raw materials, and finding increased uses for each. The whole course of human development and progress, and the ultimate extinction of those peoples which lagged behind can be traced in this way.

There is no record as to which was the first raw material adapted by man to his use, but probably his first weapon was a wooden club with which to kill his prey and defend himself against his enemies. Those who fought with clubs were speedily ousted by those who armed themselves with axe, arrow and spearheads of flint, and they in turn fell before the men with weapons of bronze. The discovery of iron, and later of steel, marked further steps forward, and so the process will continue.

There is neither space nor time to concern ourselves with the immense diversity of raw materials at our disposal, but it should be noted that there is no record of any known raw material ever becoming obsolete. In fact, all records point the other way, and the tendency has been to multiply the uses to which they may be put. So it has been with wood, and few of us are aware as to how much it has permeated our daily lives. If for some cause or other we were to be suddenly deprived of all our timber stocks, the result would be catastrophic, and our present mode of life would speedily collapse. No coal or iron could be mined, as these require wooden props for their extraction. Mechanical transport, which has sometimes been described as the life blood of a modern community, would eventually cease, and our cities cease to function as centres of population. How far the clock of human progress would be set back it is impossible to say, but there is no doubt that considerable re-adjustment would be necessary. The question of

providing adequate substitutes would immediately arise, and the problem would not be completely solved, as there are many functions for which timber may be regarded as irreplaceable. Even if it were possible to fabricate materials to take its place, such an inordinate proportion of human energy would have to be devoted to providing them, that other activities would be bound to diminish. Our present standard of life would have to go by the board, and a much simpler take its place.

Warnings have been uttered from time to time that world consumption of timber greatly exceeds total production, and that in future years, if not in the lifetime of some of us, the peoples of the earth will be faced with an acute timber shortage or even famine. Not all utterances on this subject have been unanimous, yet, nevertheless, such warnings should not be entirely disregarded, and those nations which do not meet their timber requirements from within their own borders, and have to depend to a large extent upon imports, would do well to set their house in order in that respect.

Much has been heard of the new world which is to emerge after the present conflict has been decided. At the risk of appearing cynical it must be remarked that similar hopes were expressed a quarter of a century ago, and how far they fell short of realisation is dismal history. Human nature changes slowly, and it would be unwise to discount the probability of future world wars. In their Report on Post-war Forest Policy by H.M. Forestry Commissioners, no such facile optimism is expressed, when it is assumed "that with the development of aerial warfare it will become increasingly inconvenient in future emergencies to have to transport timber by sea."

Should such prove to be the case, and at present there is no reason to doubt it, there would appear to be very cogent reasons why the timber importing nations should take all possible steps to secure adequate growing timber reserves within their own borders. It may be said that such is a matter for their Governments to decide, but no government can lay down a long term policy unless it has public opinion behind it. The people themselves must have an acute realisation of the important bearing which woods and forests have upon the national well-being. In other words, the man in the street must have a forest sense. That this sense is lacking, owing to a variety of causes, cannot be denied, and the fits and starts to which the Forestry Commissioners' activities were subjected during their earlier years of existence are ample proof of its absence in Great Britain.

Our own people are very little better in this respect, although there have been in recent years encouraging signs of an awakening forest sense. The Society of Irish Foresters must do all it can to stimulate an interest in forestry, and to develop an appreciation of its importance in the minds of our citizens. Although it has been formed around a small nucleus of professional foresters, as Technical members, there is no desire to create the impression that it exists for them alone. They merely provide an essential foundation upon which to build. Associate membership is open to all who have an interest in the possession or cultivation of trees, or who merely love trees for their own sake.

Naturally, the forester, who is a silviculturalist, or one who grows trees as a crop, is preoccupied with what he may expect will go on the saw-bench at the end of the rotation, but the lighter graces of arboriculture, or growing trees for their own sake, must not be neglected. The Arbutus, to which Mrs. Henry refers in her extracts from *Trees of Great Britain and Ireland* (Elwes and Henry), is not a timber tree, but would anyone willingly agree to its extinction on that account? Other species of low commercial value grace our country-side, but their perpetuation should not be governed by financial considerations. In an agricultural community, trees have other parts to play beyond the mere provision of saw-timber. Conservation of moisture, prevention of soil erosion, wind shelter, and aid to rural beauty are benefits which can hardly be expressed in commercial terms, but they possess values which are nevertheless real and indispensable.