

"Balsam in the Forest." E. MONGEY. *Irish Medical Journal*,
September, 1945.

Because forestry in this country is the pursuit of a very small minority, the general public has very little contact with the details of the work. Although the farmer is quite prepared for an apparent city man who can discuss the merits of crop rotations and grass seed mixtures, the forester is quite taken aback when he meets someone "outside the ranks" who can discuss, say, the silviculture of the Scots Pine-Larch mixture. In fact, the public, while on the whole favouring a rapid expansion of our forest area, are unashamedly vague as regards the technical and practical aspects of the work. Hence the professional forester is unusually appreciative of the outsider's interest—although he retains a tendency born of experience to discount his suggestions and to become didactic.

Which brings us to the point. In Dr. Mongey's short article, we must wholeheartedly welcome his enthusiasm for forestry and his efforts to arouse a similar enthusiasm both in his own district of Castlebar and among his professional colleagues. It is unfortunate that he would appear to show a tendency to facile and dangerous generalisation against which his scientific training should have been proof. In addition his knowledge of forestry abroad appears wider than his knowledge of progress at home.

We are told of the laborious re-afforestation of French mountains and "sandy wastes"; of the financial returns from German and Swiss municipal forests; of the reduction of the forest area of the U.S.A. The references to what has been done here are sufficiently brief to be quoted in full: "So far there has been no

concerted effort to utilise our three or four million acres suitable for forest land, and now deteriorating to the point of exhaustion."

"The State will have to provide a corps of experts to act as instructors and advisers and to provide the seedlings from their nurseries. It can also take over large sparsely-populated areas such as Erris, Connemara, Burren, etc., to make National Forests, as well as providing demonstration forests in every county." (There is already at least one State forest in every county except Meath—how these differ from "demonstration forests" is not clear). Further on we are told: "A State grant is available to any land-owner planting forest trees. This grant more than pays the cost of seedlings, fertilisers and planting, but sufficient interest has not been aroused to induce farmers to take a long term view." We leave comment on this excerpt to the private planter. The quotations are sufficient to betray an extraordinary haziness regarding our forest position which vitiates the whole article.

To come to the questionable generalisations. The statement that the crop is fit for felling at 20-30 years does not accord with practice or economics. These ultra-short rotations reduce the quality of the produce and the Mean Annual Increment of the site unnecessarily, as well as involving frequent and equally unnecessary repetition of heavy establishment costs. Again "Disease during growth will likely be easily controlled by the new insecticides such as D.D.T." Such optimistic views are not shared by forest pathologists as reference to Mr. Quirke's article in this *Journal* will indicate.

"A forest area of 30 % of the land surface is considered necessary for climatic reasons." The best opinion is that forest will have a negligible effect on our insular climate.

"It is estimated that about half the area of our maritime counties should be under forest." We are altogether unable to understand this calculation. Could it possibly be a resurrection of that hoary chestnut of planting a shelterbelt around Ireland as if it were a mere "haggard"?

This article, typical of much popular literature on Irish forestry should give members of our Society food for thought. Have we foresters been remiss in the matter of propaganda? What is to be our attitude to the public? Is it to be "Provide the money, ask no questions, leave forestry to the forester" or are we to take the public into our confidence, provide it with full and up-to-date information on our position and encourage an interest in our technical problems? Our Society can help by enlarging its associate membership and thus fostering an intelligent public opinion but, in the last analysis, we must look to the State to provide in attractive and easily-digested form, the fullest possible statistical information concerning both state and private woodland, our timber capital, and current trends and policy.