
Reviews

Forests and Forestry in Great Britain. W. L. Taylor, C.B.E. Crosby
Lockwood & Son, Ltd., London. 12/6.

This is a handy little volume of 167 pages with twenty well chosen photographic illustrations. In his preface the author states that he has endeavoured to steer a middle course between the Scylla of generalisation and the Charybdis of technicality. The

decision was wise, as it would be impossible to compress a purely technical work within such a narrow compass, and we are presented with a book which will be regarded as light reading by the professional forester but ought to prove of absorbing interest to the general reader who may be desirous of acquiring some knowledge of silviculture.

In his fifteen chapters the author has covered a very wide field ranging from the incidence of surface vegetation after the Great Ice Age of some ten thousand years ago to the impact of two world wars upon British woodlands and his final chapter is devoted to a discussion of the possibility of a world timber famine.

To deal with each chapter in detail would require a review almost as long as the book itself and discussion must be confined to the major issues he raises and how far they are applicable over here. In his third chapter he commences with two definitions which deserve quotation *in extenso*.

“Forestry is the art of growing rotational crops of timber trees in forests and woods. Forests are tracts of land devoted to the growth of trees, and the clearest definition of a forest is that it is a very big wood, or a series of large woods, cultivated and managed for the production of timber, bark, resin, seeds, and all other items of minor produce we derive from forest trees.”

The main proportion of the woodlands in both Great Britain and Ireland are in the hands of private owners who almost invariably planted for amenity and sporting purposes. Great as the contribution has been from these woods to the timber reserves of both nations it would have been immeasurably greater had they been subjected to silvicultural management during the course of their lives. In his definition of a forest the author rightly emphasises the necessity of size. The forester must have elbow room if his working plans and felling cycles are to be designed to operate with maximum efficiency and in most cases the privately owned woodlands did not permit of this. Later he condemns in no uncertain terms the spendthrift policy of withdrawing from the woods a quantity of timber greater than the current increment. In forestry, as in any other business undertaking, continual encroachment upon capital eventually leads to bankruptcy.

In his fourth chapter dealing with land for new forests he has treated the subject briefly and effectively but could have said a great deal more. From his long experience with the Forestry Commissioners he could have quoted instances of dismal failures incurred by attempting to establish plantations on unsuitable sites. In fact he could have been very positive in stating definitely what types of land should not be accepted for forest purposes and this is about the only criticism that can be made about an otherwise excellent book. He is on very sure ground, and every experienced

forester will agree with him, when he states that exposure to wind is the dominant factor in assessing the possibility of land for afforestation. In Ireland this factor is even more potent than in Great Britain, where there is much more land shelter than here and where they are further removed from the prevailing wind. Mr. Taylor refers to the 1,500 feet contour as the plantable limit but except in such favourable situations as the Wicklow massif the Irish forester has to think in terms of 1,000 feet and even this progressively diminishes the further the land lies to the west.

Chapter 12 deals with fire and gives useful advice as to the precautions against its occurrence and measures to be taken to cope with an outbreak. It deserves serious attention from both public and foresters alike.

Elsewhere in his book the author dips lightly into Forest economics and on page 158 states that Forestry in Great Britain could be conducted on a basis of an expected yield of between 3 % and $3\frac{1}{2}$ % per annum. It is difficult to reconcile these figures even with a much higher yield than the 40 cubic feet per acre per annum upon which they were based.

The final chapter deals with the prospect of a world timber famine. It does not attempt to supply an answer but it does enunciate two inescapable truths. One is that the timber producing nations will need to ensure that their annual cut does not exceed the annual increment and the other is that timber-consuming nations should take prompt steps to establish forest reserves within their own territories.