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# SOME COMMENTS ON IRISH FORESTRY

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The following thoughts were provoked by attendance at the Society's annual excursion in June, 1947, when I had my first opportunity since my return to Ireland to study on the ground the work of the Irish forestry service.

Let me say first that I cannot remember a holiday I enjoyed more and that I greatly appreciated the many kindnesses shown me by members and, last but not least, a most delightful and instructive drive through a part of the country more or less unknown to me whereby I got a good way home in comfort !

I was surprised to find how much I did *not* know about forestry in Ireland and others are much better fitted than I to discourse on silvicultural matters. It did occur to me, however, that seeds of birch and other hardy species might be scattered in places now considered too high or too infertile for economic planting. They should improve the soil in time and so gradually increase the plantable area.

I would, in all diffidence, make from the economic point of view three suggestions:—

1. That a silviculturist be appointed.
2. That a Working Plans officer be appointed.

3. That there be more decentralisation, combined with more co-ordination with County Councils and other local bodies.

#### I. SILVICULTURIST.

It must be very obvious to anyone who comes in contact with its officers that we have here a keen and able Forest Service. We must, however, bear in mind three facts:

- (a) Organised forestry in Britain and Ireland is very new, only 25 years or so old, less than half the shortest timber rotation.
- (b) The climate and the numerous geological changes over comparatively small areas makes forestry here a much more difficult and diverse affair silviculturally than on the Continent so that we must evolve our own technique.
- (c) Owing to the lack of large private forest estates we have little or no data to go on.

Individual officers make valuable experiments and acquire much useful knowledge but the information, however important, is of little use unless it is easily and quickly available so that results from different parts of the country can readily be looked up and compared. Having to hunt through files is laborious, and, besides, officers get transferred and we have not all the same interests so that experiments started by one officer may or may not be continued. I think we need a large number of experimental plots of various kinds. As an example, in one forest we visited we found natural regeneration of almost every kind of tree—a silviculturist's dream, this. If we had a silviculturist all experiments could be carried out systematically and their results would be easily accessible as and when required. In this way knowledge gained would be cumulative and comparable, not haphazard and uncorrelated.

#### 2. WORKING PLANS.

In Burma we had reached the stage of having a Working Plan for each Forest Division—as the executive administrative unit was called. These plans varied from rough “paper” plans for the less developed areas to concise and detailed ones based on countings for the more advanced areas. Even in the “paper” plans Part I contained the past history and the appendices full statistics, while Part II at any rate gave the objects of management and the broad lines of approach. Thus each officer coming to a new Division knew immediately where he was. Proposals always included a list of areas to be examined for “reservation.” This would correspond to areas to be examined for acquisition here. Incidentally, much stress was laid on the need for completion of “reservation” as soon as possible

and a definite programme in order of urgency had to be prescribed. In this way continuity of effort—so necessary in long-term work like forestry—was assured. This, I submit, can be accomplished only when there is a Working Plans Officer with a permanent establishment to co-ordinate all work.

### 3. DECENTRALISATION AND CO-ORDINATION WITH LOCAL BODIES.

Forestry is very young here and in consequence there is a general, though vague, feeling that we should have more timber. But if anyone tries to acquire land for growing it the reaction often is, I imagine, that "there's plenty of land elsewhere for these fellows from Dublin." I think that the Working Plans Officer, having got in the necessary reports from the officers in his District is thereby in a better position to discuss local affairs in his Division than an overworked administrative head in Dublin could possibly be. I think that four or five "Sub-directors" should be appointed for different parts of the country. We should by now be reaching the stage when the service has a number of senior experienced officers.

Again, while opinion is vaguely favourable to forestry, few have much idea of what it really means. I started a correspondence in the *Irish Statesman* over twenty years ago. Two schools of thought emerged. One rhapsodised on the green hills and valleys of Erin, all once covered with trees. How the large herds of cattle our ancestors had could have lived in this unbroken forest I do not know. The other school looked up the area of the State, subtracted the areas of cultivated land, lakes, towns, etc., and the remainder was to be planted up at once! It did not occur to anyone that a steady annual output of x cubic feet of timber is of more use than 50x for ten years followed by nil for another ten years. These Sub-directors by holding conferences from time to time with County Councillors and so on could spread a knowledge of forestry which would produce practical as distinguished from academic co-operation.

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