

Forestry and Forest Products. World Situation 1937-1946. By the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations.

In August, 1946, the Forestry section of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations issued a report entitled *Forestry and Forest Products—World Situation 1937-1946*. The report runs to 93 pages and includes a preface by Sir John Boyd Orr, Director General of F.A.O. In the introduction the statistical deficiencies with which the compilers had to contend are outlined.

In Part I of the report the forestry position in the world—both pre-war and up to 1947—is presented. Table I gives figures of forest area, output, consumption for the various regions of the world, Europe, U.S.S.R., Middle East and North Africa, North America, Central and South America, Africa, South and East Asia, and Pacific Area. The situation in each region is discussed and summed up.

In Part II the estimated requirements and supplies of timber, pulp, firewood and other forest products are presented.

In conclusion the report stated that the facts presented in Parts I and II lead to one significant conclusion—a world-wide wood shortage exists and threatens to become critical.

While the Tables of Statistics with which the report is richly furnished are no doubt of intense interest, there is so much about forestry that figures cannot tell that a study of the broad conclusions reached by the able compilers of this report are of far greater significance than the figures in the balance sheets.

In this connection the Preface by Sir John Boyd-Orr is excellent; it puts the case of forestry before the lay reader in a very convincing manner. The following quotations are of special application to Ireland:—

“Lumber is man’s chief building material. . . . Since building trades normally provide the backbone of economic prosperity and high employment levels—this shortage of structural woods if allowed to continue may seriously impede the expansion of world economy.

“The basic factors contributing to the world chronic timber shortage are deforestation, inadequate forest management, failure to develop mature forests, incomplete utilization and insufficient technical personnel.

“The remedy, too, is clear. The forest must be managed as perpetually renewable crops. Afforestation must be undertaken on a scale never before dreamed of, to create forest values in areas now barren and restore millions of hectares lost to agriculture. . . . The number of trained foresters must be increased many times.”

To state our own forestry position and needs one would require only to substitute the word “Ireland” for “the world” in the above extracts from this ably written preface. Those seeking to make the

case for the forest and the products of the forest might well learn the following quotation from Sir John's preface by heart:—

“ Wood is shelter and warmth. It is the paper you hold, the book you read. It is the world's most versatile raw material. No other substance provides fuel, fibre, sugar, alcohol, synthetic rubber, explosives, and even protein food, while serving endless structural uses. And year by year these products multiply. In the laboratory, under electronic microscopes, and in test tubes, wood that yesterday was looked on only as lumber or fuel is being taken apart and its character profoundly altered. The chemical possibilities have barely been touched, and fibre chemistry is opening up an entire new field of plastics and textiles, and permits the economic pulping of almost any wood species and of much waste from the sawmills. Large factories are being built to convert sawdust and wood unsuitable for lumber and pulp into ethyl alcohol, cattle feed and chemicals. Scientists believe they may soon duplicate in minutes what nature took millions of years to do, and, by converting wood into hydrocarbons, enable the renewable forests to augment the nonrenewable reserves of oil.”

T. C.