

THE PLACE OF FORESTRY IN THE NATIONAL LIFE

(Report of symposium held on the occasion of the Ninth Annual General Meeting of the Society of Irish Foresters).

Mr. Mooney.

MR. MOONEY, forestry officer, was the first speaker and mooted the idea of the communal forest. We had seen, he said, over the past few years a great revival of interest in afforestation in this country. At the top level we had the announced policy of the Government to step up the annual planting programme to 25,000 acres with an ultimate target of over one million acres of plantations. As well as our own Society we had such groups as the Trees for Ireland Committee, the Roadside Tree Association, *Macra na Feirme* and others all doing their share in encouraging tree-planting. The newspapers too had given forestry more than its usual share of publicity, and had, without exception, supported and recommended to their readers the great idea of forestry and urged its adoption on a far greater scale than at present.

Encouraged by this awakening of interest, he was going to suggest yet another means of getting trees planted. The idea he was about to offer, the communal forest, was by no means a new one and has been well known in Europe for hundreds of years. It is the forest that is owned by the *commune* or local administrative body as distinct from either the State-owned or privately-owned forest. Before the last war Germany had 4,857,500 acres of such forest, which represents 15.5% of her total forest area. In France too, the communal forest is a strong part of the forestry system and in most European countries the communal forest system exists. The usual area of these forests ranges from 200 to 1,300 acres and they are managed by qualified foresters generally under the 'remote control' of the State forest service.

We have all seen, he said, in our wanderings through the country the rocky valley with its steep slopes covered with bracken and gorse, the old woodland site now a tangled mass of briar and thicket scrub vegetation, the higher heather-clad slopes—all productive forest lands but at present not contributing one penny to the country's economy and seemingly fated to remain in untouched unproductivity to the end of time. These small areas of waste ground which vary from one to fifty acres in extent are general and will be found scattered over every county but they are particularly noticeable in Wicklow, Tipperary, Cork, Kerry, Clare and Donegal. They can rarely be handled by the State forestry service, being too small and scattered for economic management by a service constituted to deal with blocks of thousands of acres. The farmers on whose holdings they occur may sometimes have the urge to plant them but lack the means to do so. Generally, however, both the urge to plant and the means to do so are lacking. Consequently

(iii) The powers of County Councils under the Agricultural Act of 1931 are more closely allied to forestry of a commercial or semi-commercial nature. Under this Act the County Council is required to provide a minimum sum out of its rates [at least two pence in the pound] to its County Committee of Agriculture to be applied to its agricultural and allied schemes in addition the Council may strike a special rate of $\frac{1}{2}$ d. in the £ reserved particularly to forestry. Much good work has been done under this Act but the schemes have all aimed at aiding the individual to help himself and this aid has had to be restricted so that the limited sum available could be made to meet the needs of all who wished to avail of the scheme. The County Committee of Agriculture is a body principally concerned with technical advice and it has not either the resources or the powers to undertake the work itself. Its efforts at encouraging afforestation are usually confined to the provision of a limited number of transplants at reduced prices.

Local authorities also provide scholarships which can be availed of in forestry at the National University but that so few avail of them for this subject shows the need for education in both national and secondary schools of necessity for and importance of afforestation.

The combined contribution of Local Bodies to forestry under the above heads seldom cost more than one or at most two pence in the £ on the Rates but a scheme as envisaged by Mr. Mooney would cost up to 1/- in the £. This he said was not to be taken as a criticism of Mr. Mooney's proposals but rather to show that they represented a fundamental departure from present practice and a bold solution for an important national problem, the planting of relatively small pieces of lands unsuited for other purposes. The scheme had the further merit—and in this it was almost unique in proposals normally made to Local Authorities—in that all expenditure would in a short time yield a substantial income and return for the capital invested, not merely in shelter or amenity or other intangible form, but in hard cash.

That a scheme such as that envisaged by Mr. Mooney was not beyond the scope or capabilities of Local Authorities is adequately illustrated by the success they have achieved in such diverse schemes as housing, turf production, drainage, road making, etc. It was impossible at the moment to foresee and discuss in detail all the difficulties likely to arise and the many questions raised by the proposal but he thought that as a scheme it undoubtedly was worthy of very serious consideration and publicity.

In the past two years, he said, some £2,000,000 had been spent on minor drainage schemes and we should remember that the American money so used was repayable over 35 years at $2\frac{1}{2}\%$ interest. If we could afford such expenditure then the sum of £16,000 per county on a forestry scheme seemed quite feasible, but public opinion would have to make the decision. He felt, however, that any approach to grant the

necessary powers to spend their own money on establishing their own forests would be welcomed by local authorities.

He suggested that a forestry scheme could be run in conjunction with drainage schemes, while the nursery problem might be tackled by the Vocational Schools. It would be necessary however, to educate and foster a spirit of forest consciousness in the public before such a scheme could hope to succeed.

Mr. Litton.

The next speaker, Mr. Litton, gave his views as a farmer on the position of forestry in the national life. Farming and trees, he said, had much in common, but he would not agree with forestry experts dictating to the farmer, who really knew his own business best. He had seen a slogan that the "onus of tree planting lies with the farmer" but he did not take that seriously as he believed it was put out by nurserymen. He had also heard that trees would improve the climate but he considered that the climate did not need improving: we had, he thought, one of the best climates in the world. Again he had heard that trees beautify the countryside and induce more tourists to come here, but this he called a fantastic idea. If it was going to draw more tourists he certainly did not want it. There was nothing more distressing to him than gates left open, crops ruined, and plantations burned by careless tourists brought here because we had beautified the countryside. Trees for shelter were, he said, the farmer's own business and the farmer was the best judge of whether such shelter was necessary and where to put it.

From the farmer's point of view, if forestry was going to take a place in the national life it must be as a commercial proposition. He thought Mr. Mooney's scheme was most undesirable. It was suggested it would cost up to 1/- in the £ on the rates and this would put the farmer out of business. Farmers already paid a heavier tax than anyone else and he considered it would be unjust to increase the rates by 1/- in the £ for forestry purposes.

If you want to get the farmer interested he said you must show by more than mere figures that it will pay—figures do not cut much ice with the farmer, he will move very slowly which is really the best and only way. He was not himself convinced that the proposed scheme was a paying proposition.

We all want to see more trees to improve the country, he said, and in the national outlook it might be far better to have more trees on the marginal lands. In mountain farms they graze a few sheep or cattle on these lands and while the output is very low the forester says trees would pay better, you cannot convert the value of this land to the farmer in hard cash, it must be taken in relation to the whole farm. If you take this land away you upset his economy so you simply can't take it away—if he loses this high ground his farm goes 'flop'.

The acquisition of the rough hill grazing for forestry will need an alteration in our system of husbandry and that will need research, research in the breeding of stock, in farm management, in land utilization, in forestry and the re-education of the farmer in the new system.

Farming and forestry, he said, must go hand in hand and he considered that the ideal solution lay not in Local Administration but in attaching the forest to the farm under the farmer, with some Government controls and a Government-sponsored company to deal with utilization.

Mr. FitzPatrick.

Mr. FitzPatrick, who possessed the dual qualification of both farmer and forestry expert, dealt with the economic aspect of forestry in the national life. It was most important he said to grow just what we needed otherwise we would have a surplus of one class of material and a deficiency of another. Our former target of 600,000 acres of plantations was, he understood, based on our consumption of timber and timber products for the year 1932-33. This was a curious year on which to base our figures as it was a year of depression and our present target of 1,000,000 acres seems much nearer the mark.

There were, he said, 300,000 farms and 400,000 rural dwellings in the country and these would need 10,000,000 stakes and 1,200,000 wooden gates. These could be made to last longer by chemical preservatives but even then they will not last for ever and constant replacements are necessary. Proper preservation of such materials was as good as growing extra timber, but unfortunately there was no firm in Ireland at present to supply preserved timber to the farmer. Besides this the farmers' homes and out offices would need timber for repairs and renovations and this would take a further 2,400,000 cu. ft. of timber annually. To meet these needs and from his own experience as a farmer he was convinced that trees were absolutely invaluable on the farm.

Almost every farm, he thought, had a bit of waste ground which could be planted and most farmers had the spare time to do the planting. Unfortunately they were accustomed to crops ripening in 5 to 6 months and the shift to a ripening period of 30 to 50 years was a big jerk to them. Fencing, particularly rabbit fencing, was another bugbear, and an expensive one.

While he knew from experience that it was difficult to grow trees on the farm, it was by no means impossible. The main thing, of course, was to grow the type of material required. There was a growing demand for small-sized stuff for stakes and fencing materials and for processing into pulp and fibre, etc. Rural electrification would take one-and-a-half million transmission poles and these again would require constant replacements. *Pinus contorta* had been found suitable for transmission poles in America and he would suggest that P.C. might

be planted on better land than was customary at present, for a quick return.

One of the merits of Mr. Mooney's scheme was the provision of a constant and assured supply of timber for small local industries. At present it was possible for an outside firm or individual to buy up an entire wood and so deprive the small local industry of its raw material. When a wood is cut down and exploited it is gone for ever for that generation. The small industry while dependent on the local wood seldom had the capital to buy it outright and preserve it for their own needs.

The speaker said he favoured Mr. Mooney's scheme and he thought farmers would do their part if encouraged. The whole question of species to plant, and size of materials to produce would need expert examination and the farmer would need constant advice on what to plant, when to fell, the best way to market the produce. He envisaged a scheme with a forestry expert in every county who in addition to looking after the County Council forestry scheme would advise parish councils and individual farmers on all matter pertaining to forestry.

A general debate followed to which the following members contributed :

Mr. T. McCarty, who said that from his experience the farmers had very little interest in forestry and even this little was only maintained for a short time. He got his plants at approximately half market price from the County Council and he also got a grant from the Government for planting but he neglected after-care needed to produce good plantations. He agreed with the County Council forestry scheme as practised at present in Kildare (for which County he was forester) and gave figures to show it was a sound commercial proposition. He suggested that a start could be made on a smaller scale than that proposed by Mr. Mooney and said it would not cost anything like 1/- in the £ on the rates. At present, he said, the rates paid for our agricultural, our horticultural and our poultry schemes so why not for our forestry scheme as well?

Mr. Galvin said that the Kildare scheme was not worked on the lines of Mr. Mooney's proposal. He pointed out that land tenure on the Continent was different to here and he thought that pride of ownership would be a big obstacle to communal forestry here.

Forestry, he said, was a highly technical and extremely critical science and outside the scope of County Councils and County Managers who were in any event already overburdened. He also thought that the present County Council schemes were adequate if fully availed of. He would not agree with Vocational Schools handling the forest nurseries as nursery technique requires more skill and attention than Vocational Schools could give it and he thought the nurseries could safely be left to private enterprise.

Mr. Mangan said there was a lack of pioneer spirit among farmers. We had yet to sell the idea of forestry to the farmer and while it was going to be difficult it was not impossible. The E.S.B. rural electrification scheme had made a provisional estimate of one million transmission poles for their requirements over the first ten years, but in actual fact they had only used between 40,000 and 50,000 poles a year to date. They were, he said, going to test poles of native *Thuya Plicata*, Corsican Pine and Sitka Spruce for their suitability as transmission poles but he was very doubtful if *Pinus Contorta* would be suitable. In the first place it was very difficult to get a straight stem of P.C. of suitable dimensions and secondly the absorption of cresote by P.C. was very high and could be as much as 25 lbs. per cubic foot which would make the prepared P.C. poles as dear as poles of other species.

Mr. Bogue said that in many instances the sites of roadside belts and screens had been very badly chosen. They had been put under telegraph and power lines and in due course it was found necessary to prune them. Even this operation is only too frequently badly carried out and the trees were mutilated and disfigured. This was certainly no encouragement to the farmer to plant for himself and a little more care in the planning and subsequent treatment of their screens and shelter belts by Local Authorities was indicated.