

Corcashel Plantation, Co. Cavan.

By J. E. JOHNSTON

AMONG the areas of woodland owned by Public Bodies in Ireland is a Plantation of about 30 acres in West Cavan belonging to the County Council and situated in Corcashel Townland.

The countryside around it consists of bare drumlin ridges divided into fields by a network of whitish drystone walls and as the wood occupies a north-western brow at between 330 ft. and 470 ft. elevation it is a conspicuous feature in the scenery; particularly as it is backed by mountain ridges rising about a mile away to the South East.

About 45 years ago the holding fell derelict on the hands of the County Council, who had it planted with a mixture of conifers, which were interplanted with hardwoods in the margin next to the public road. 70,000 young trees were stated to have been used—European and Japanese Larches, Scots pine and smaller amounts of Norway spruce were selected; together with Silver fir, Douglas fir, Beech, Oak, Sweet Chestnut, Ash and Alder in the roadside strip.

Scots pine occupies a little over half the area and the other species the remainder.

From evidence on the ground the trees appear to have been planted on mounds, made of sods obtained from an extensive network of shallow drains, and both pure blocks and intimate mixtures of the species are to be found.

The selections and techniques would have been in agreement with the up-to-date afforestation practices of the time.

At present the roadside margin gives a somewhat misleading impression of the general prosperity of the stand as it is stocked with Scots pine of 20 to 30 ft. in height mingled with individual specimens of the minor species of the crop, some of which are considerably taller than the pines. Silver fir, Douglas fir and Oak are particularly noticeable, but are wind blasted on the exposed sides of the crowns.

Within the Plantation and on the higher slopes development improves until the best of the Norway spruce and Japanese Larch are met with. These consist of beautifully straight and cleanly developed stems of 48 to 54 ft. in height and 8 inches Q.G.b.h.

The form of the Larch is remarkably good, and would suggest that it may be of hybrid origin. A few Scots surviving among the Larch are also of good stem form, and over 40 ft. in height, but the crowns are sparse and exhibit a good deal of pine shoot beetle damage. Lightly furnished crowns, bearing two years' needles are typical of all the Scots pine in the Plantation.

In general the dominant trees of the Scots pine portions of the stand have attained a height of about 35 ft. with slender stems of 5 inches Q.G.b.h. and in a few patches of wet ground bearing strong tufted *Molinia* they have scarcely closed canopy, and exhibit butt rot, which does not appear elsewhere in the crop.

The site on which the wood is growing consists of inert, gleyed boulder clay of carboniferous sandstone origin.

The soil has a gritty texture, poor seepage characteristics, and fresh profiles show a typical mottled colouring at shallow depths. The water table has always been close to the surface, even on the steepest portions of the slope, and slight peat formations are present on the flatter parts.

The vegetation on similar land around the Plantation consists of a sward of short jointed rush, sedges and heath grasses such as *Agrostis stolonifera* and *Molinia*, with devil's bit and a colouring of weak heather.

Under the tree canopy this has modified to *Deschampsia*, *Molinia*, brambles and creeping soft grass, with traces of weak rush (*J. communis*). Holly and wood sorrel are making headway over much of the area. Woodland mosses are well developed.

Pure *Molinia* covers the few wet flattish areas where the pines are weakest.

From an examination of soil profiles it would appear that the roots of all species have been confined to the surface foot of depth, with the exception of Alder, which penetrated the gleyed sub-soil for two feet or more.

This suggests that Alder may have a special significance in forest soil development and conservation on poorly aerated sites.

On the wetter portions of the land the main tree roots either rest on the actual ground surface or penetrate only an inch or two, which accounts for the stunted growth of Scots pine and European Larch on these sites.

Remarkably little damage was done to the wood by the gales of January 1957. Less than a dozen individual blown trees were observed. The stand is relatively exposed to the prevailing winds which sweep up from Lough Allen, which lies to the South-west, and impinge fairly directly on to the "bulge" of the hill on which it is.

At the time the Plantation was laid down it must have been a pioneering effort by the Council as there is very little evidence of tree growth on similar sites in the locality, and the present state of development of a considerable proportion of the wood, stocked with Japanese larch and Norway spruce is a good advertisement for forestry enterprise. In this connection a number of small shelterbelts, of under 20 years old, around farmhouses in the locality are encouraging. They are stocked with hybrid Larch, Sitka spruce; and *Pinus contorta*. Direct comparisons between small shelter strips and plantations are hardly satisfactory, but all three species show promise of equivalent or better productivity (particularly Sitka spruce) compared with the best portions of the older stand.

In conclusion I wish to acknowledge the ready consent and helpful information given by the Cavan County Council when I expressed a desire to examine their Plantation and prepare this note on it.