

Review

Report by the Minister for Lands on Forestry for the period 1st April, 1957 to the 31st March, 1958

(The Stationery Office, Dublin. 2s.)

WHEN this report came to hand with the editor's request for a review one was rather inclined to take the easy way out and reproduce the main features of the report from the summary so temptingly supplied. However, there is little point in a review that simply repeats or rehearses the information presented in a summary of this kind. Short of reproducing the whole publication one would fail to do justice to the range of information presented. There is an enormous amount and range of statistical data compressed into a booklet of twenty-eight pages and the only feeling that one has on scanning the tables that crowd the pages is that there is so much left unsaid, so little by way of comment that would bring more life into this skeleton of facts. A record area of 23,268 acres of productive forestry land was acquired during the year. This is very heartening indeed and is a fine tribute to the work of the acquisition staff concerned. It would, however, be so interesting to know where this land was acquired—the counties figured in this expansion of forestry and what types of land were acquired. The absence of the once familiar map showing the location of the forestry centres and the table showing the progress of forestry operations in the various forests during the season is keenly felt by the reviewer. It would be a great pity if the Annual Reports were to be so condensed that all references to progress by forest or by county were completely eliminated.

Looking back over earlier reports one cannot fail to be struck by the remarkable expansion that has taken place in the twenty-five years since forestry came under the Minister for Lands and Fisheries. In 1933 the

area held was 52,604½ acres—at the end of 1957/58 there were 365,230 acres. The total wooded area held by the State in 1933/34 was 50,533 acres and by the 31st March, 1958 the figure had grown to 257,467 acres. It is interesting to observe that the afforested area, owned by the State here, now considerably exceeds that owned by the State in Denmark.

Among other remarkable changes that have taken place over the twenty-five years is the development of mechanical preparation of ground. The total area mechanically prepared for planting in 1957/58 was 9,472 acres. In 1933 the prospect of mechanical preparation was scarcely envisaged, and mound planting was still a novelty. To-day hand-mounding is outmoded and is applied only where ploughing is not feasible. The change in species used is also remarkable when one considers how conservative foresters are said to be. The spruces are as popular as ever—even more so—with Sitka heading the list at 43.2% of the various species planted and Norway at 9% showing up well, in the year 1957/58. In 1933 the figures were: Sitka 27¼% and Norway 15½%. The dramatic decline of Scots pine, however, is worthy of note. It has fallen from top place, with a representation of 31½% in 1933, to 4.5% in 1957/58. If this decline continues there is every indication that Scots pine will so fall from statistical grace that it will be lost to anonymity, like Douglas fir, among other conifers. The writing is on the wall for the old favourite European larch which has fallen from 8¼% in 1933 to 0.7% in 1958 and must surely disappear from the lists in the near future. The relatively unknown contorta pine of 1933, with its then 6½% representation, has now jumped to an unchallenged second place at 30.2% in 1958. These changes have taken place in less than half a forestry rotation and well within the working life of a forester. It is doubtful if a forestry organisation anywhere, at any time, has had to deal with an expansion of this kind which has also involved such radical changes in techniques, sites and species. It is also unlikely that the next twenty-five years will see such dramatic changes.

One naturally looks to the sales and production side of a report of this kind and here again there is remarkable evidence of heartening expansion. Total forest income from all sources, including timber sales, for the year was £331,967. The volume of material sold was 5.3 million cubic feet. While comparisons in this field with the 1933 figures are apt to be misleading due to changes in money values it is still indicative of the changed times to see that the total income in 1933 was £5,487.

Private planting in 1958 was at a low level with only 424 acres planted under the planting grant scheme. Measures to stimulate private planting forecast in the report included the raising of the planting grant to £20 per acre and the provision of a free technical advisory service. In 1933 the planting grant was £4 per acre and the area planted was a mere 127 acres. Thus, private forestry has been in a moribund condition for over a quarter of a century and there is little to enthuse about

in the recent statistics. The increased grant and the intensive propaganda drive of the last two years must surely bring a much needed revival in this important branch of forestry endeavour and one will look with interest to this section of future reports.

In conclusion, one must remark that this report fails, somehow, to do justice to the work of the Forestry Division or its officials. While self praise is no praise there is every justification for a certain amount of trumpet blowing from a branch of the Government Service with such a remarkable record for concrete achievement and work well done.

T.C.