

CHAPTER II—FOREST POLICY

GENERAL

1. *Completion of Thirty Years' Operations.*—The New Zealand Forest Service has now completed thirty years of operation. What has it achieved in that time? In bare retrospect the record to many may be disappointing. Sufficient of the pioneer element is left in the community to deplore the apparent failure to solve the problem of regenerating the indigenous forests. Rural interests cannot forget that for every acre converted to timber ten were sacrificed to the fire-stick, many of them to grow only one blade of grass where two trees grew before. Naturally they would like to see deteriorated lands restored to forest. Equally, the rural interest is concerned over the decline in farm forestry seeing few shelter-belts and wood-lots established to replace the many converted to timber. On the credit side it is generally conceded that an exotic forest resource adequate to the timber demands of the future has been created—but little else.

2. *Shortage of Trained Staff.*—Viewed against the ever-changing background of economic and political developments the record may still be disappointing, but much more understandable. To the Forest Service itself it is doubly disappointing because every Government has been extremely sympathetic in budgeting liberally for forestry development. The limiting factor over many years has been an inherent weakness in personnel. If 20 instead of only 2 professionally trained foresters had been appointed at the inception of the Service there would have been little cause for disappointment. For twenty years the maximum number of professional officers at any one time (including scientists and engineers as well as foresters) was 8. In the depression it was as low as 3, but in 1940 it was raised to 18 and is now 69. Results, from being disappointing have now become distinctly encouraging and will continue to improve as more highly-qualified professional and other officers emerge year by year from their training periods both in New Zealand and overseas.

3. *Outstanding Achievements.*—If the quality of achievement has been disappointing the quantity has been creditable and significant. Even though, indirectly very much more has been achieved in most phases of forestry work than is generally appreciated. It is true that the Forest Service has failed to evolve a practicable system of silviculture for rimu which is the most widespread of indigenous conifers, but at a modest estimate it has preserved from fire 500,000 acres of forest which some day may be regenerated to an indigenous timber crop. It has also added to the permanent forest estate some 7,000,000 acres of indigenous forest and preserved them intact not merely for future management but for the current conservation of soil and water resources. For an annual expenditure of less than 5 per cent. of that on river-control and all other soil-conservation activities the Forest Service has succeeded by organizing a nation-wide fire-protection service for forest and rural lands, in achieving 80 per cent. of all that is economically practicable in soil and water conservation. These are achievements of no mean merit.

4. *Exotic Forests Established Too Quickly.*—The exceptional and unexpected liberality of all New Zealand administrations for forestry developments—in bad as well as in good times—proved an irresistible temptation to over-expand the plantings of exotics. So long as foresters can depend beyond any possible doubt upon an uninterrupted flow of money for continuous future establishment there is no purpose in planting at a greater annual rate than the forest will be used at maturity, but in the absence—as then, and now—of any such assurance the temptation was to plant up at all times to the full extent of such man-power and moneys as were available in case no money should be forthcoming at some future period. The adverse effects have been fourfold: silvicultural treatments at appropriate times—notably pruning and thinning—have been rendered impossible; many stands must be cut when immature and others when over-mature; the percentage yield of clear or defect free wood is far too low; and as measured by compound-interest computations the cost to the national purse has been higher than necessary. The