The Forests of West Africa and the Sahara. E. P. Stebbing. (Published by Chambers, 1937. pp. VI + 245 Illustrated).

Books in which a competent forester presents an unbiassed narrative of current forestry methods and conditions in a country to which he has no official attachments (with their consequent obligations of silence on crucial matters of forest administration) are unfortunately very rare.

Professor Stebbing's latest volume is one of these rarities with, moreover, the unique feature of describing the one type of forest as administered by two different nations. His information on French methods and details of administration in the Ivory Coast forests is quite as detailed as his information on British methods in the adjoining Gold Coast and Sierra Leone. It is heartening to read that, for once, the balance is not entirely adverse to British forestry methods. Both administrations have far to go before the intricate problems of tropical forestry are solved—particularly in the unprofitable margin that separates forest and farm land from the advancing zone of desiccation and desert in Africa. It is in regard to this zone that the author makes the criticism that seems most apt : and the suggestion that will probably be most helpful to future administrators. He stresses the point that the areas previously described by ecological botanists as savannah (and currently so referred to by local foresters, who almost of necessity accept botanical dicta on such matters) are mostly not true climatic savannah, but are induced savannah or, in his phrase, "degraded, deciduous rain forest." The distinction is an important one inasmuch as the latter is decidedly less intractable to forestry treatment than is the climatic savannah. Incidentally, the point proves the often disputed argument of the need for greater precision in ecological phraseology. Professor Stebbing's contention is that the tree species found in the so-called savannah are not true savannah species and that without man-made fires the savannah appearance would gradually vanish and true rain forest could be slowly restored. With his background of administrative forestry experience he cannot admit the inevitability of fire and consequently cannot admit that so-called savannah is a defensible ecological type. As he points out, the botanist who originated the savannah legend, based his argument and his diagnosis on "non-preventable" widespread fires, as it were preordained and inevitable. Both viewpoints are understandable ; but foresters, though in many moments of pessimism they may have been tempted to admit the omnipotence of the local fire-god whether West African or Antipodean, must lean to the forester's interpretation and creed that man-made fires are *not* a natural factor.

This interpretation of the existing vegetational type leads the author to his daring prescription for checking the advancing Sahara—an international forest belt 1,370 miles in length and 15 miles in depth supported to the South by a central forest belt of lesser length, but

35 to 50 miles in depth. These belts are not to be planted *a l'americane* : but merely to be reserved and protected wholly as forestry areas. Savannah forest would scarcely respond to such treatment : degraded rain-forest under complete protection would improve without cost.

Such is the broad argument of this book, which should appeal to the general reader. It is supported by a wealth of detail which should win it a place on every forester's book-shelves. The author's style is direct, readable, and distinctive : and will transport any forestry alumnus of Edinburgh back to George Square. This is not the least of the pleasures it provided for the reviewer.

C.M.S.