

FORESTRY IN FRANCE TO-DAY.

By C. M. SMITH.

"The tragic happenings which have befallen France compelled us to interrupt the regular publication of this magazine. We resume publication as speedily as circumstances permit. No matter what our present distress and despite all losses suffered by our country, it is important not to give way to despair. We must take a grip on ourselves and work wholeheartedly for the reconstruction of a national economy. French forests have a large part to play in this reconstruction. New laws decree that professional groups of foresters will take a large part in the reorganisation of forest production."

Technical French forest magazines are now irregularly finding their way to New Zealand. The above is the gist of an editorial from one of them, written in the first six months after the occupation. There is a firmness of tone in it that cannot but evoke admiration: and the hope that before long, French foresters may be called on to apply themselves to a worthier reconstruction. Meantime, French forest tradition stands unaltered. In the depths of the gravest national disaster, the forests must not be ruined or neglected: nor must the forest capital be squandered. One wonders what disappointments are in store for such idealism.

What then of the forests? Decrees and regulations concerning forests have poured forth in an apparently endless stream. By the beginning of August, 1940—less than two months after France's tragedy—the Vichy Government decreed a 50% increase on the normal felling budget of all forests until further notice. All private owners had to render an inventory return of their holdings and forest stands within a month. By October, 1940, professional registration for everyone down to the humblest forest workman was instituted. No one without a current registration card—fee payable on registration and monthly thereafter to keep it current—could deal or work in forest produce. Maximum prices are fixed in the greatest detail. Oak must be barked and the bark sold for tanning, purchasers of oak being specially warned against objecting to this. All hardwood lop and top between 15 mm. and 60 mm. in diameter must be burnt for charcoal (chestnut and soft hardwoods excepted). Standard grades are defined for charcoal sold for producer-gas. Chestnut logs and billets over 20 centimetres in diameter may not be used for firewood. All communal forests are to come under the "forestry regime" at once.

These are a few taken at random from the numerous decrees of the Vichy Government. To the forester, they appear to indicate a period of desperate overcutting. Coal and petrol are plainly almost

unobtainable. Every effort is being made to replace them with firewood and charcoal, to ration the supplies of these, and to restrict them both in price and in method of use.

“Pulpwood is a special cause for worry. Railway sleepers form another item for special attention. Constructional timber is in keen demand.”

With such a state of affairs, it seems doubtful whether any regulations, however severe, can regulate prices, and whether any professional skill and ingenuity can avert a holocaust of overcutting. The traditional French 25% reserve must disappear very rapidly when a 50% increase of cut becomes mandatory.

But even in such an economic national crisis, the propaganda side of forestry receives attention. In November, 1940, an oak in the Forest of Tronçais became the “Chêne Marechal Petain”: and the Marshal himself found time to be present. The dedicatory speech voiced the hope that, just as careful management over many centuries has remade the Forest of Tronçais out of a 17th Century ruined jungle, so may a vigorous and sane France be rebuilt by careful management. All foresters who know Tronçais—and they are many—will concur in this hope wholeheartedly; but it may be that their prescriptions for the new working plan would differ widely from those of the dedicating official. There are many honorary freemen of Tronçais who would welcome a chance of carrying out the “coupes d’amélioration” that will be necessary before a rational working plan can be put into operation for France.