

" WOODS FORESTRY."

It is felt that the following letter published in the Journal of Forestry, Vol. 44, No. 6, June, 1946, and referring to conditions in the United States, strikes a sympathetic note in New Zealand, and sounds a warning which we would do well to heed.—Ed.

Several years ago, a popular subject for discussion was "dirt forestry." The meaning of the term is quite obvious and resulted from a general belief in the profession that too much forestry was of the office, or "swivel-chair" type. There was some justification for the criticism and it had a wholesome effect. Unfortunately, the trend became too much toward "dirt" and everything else but the trees. Foresters construct roads, buildings, telephone lines, and sawmills. They fight forest fires, develop recreational areas, buy and sell pulpwood, log, lobby for and against legislation, attempt to solve all manner of human problems, and engage in a multitude of other activities which are land management but not forestry problems.

In the early days of the U.S. Forest Service it was necessary that the foresters within the organization do much of the custodial and developmental work, for that was the immediate job ahead. The same is true in some other public and industrial organizations to-day. But shouldn't we, as a profession, relieve ourselves of non-forestry responsibilities as rapidly as possible, instead of becoming more and more jacks-of-all trades? I believe the schools will verify the statement that they are under pressure to include business and personnel administration, advanced economics, law enforcement, logging, milling, and other such specialties in their curricula, but have relatively little demand for more training in silviculture, management, and the sciences upon which forestry is based. In the "dirt" days the problems for which a forester found himself untrained were largely of craftsmanship, and he could learn to do such things as pack a mule, fight a fire, or scale a log without too much difficulty. But now we try, without much success, to become expert in a dozen allied professions and sacrifice our fundamental forestry in the attempt.

A public, or industrial forester often has land management responsibility, and if the land is to be handled primarily for the growth of timber he should determine the management policy and execute the forestry parts. An insurance company does not expect its medical examiners to be actuaries, or its actuaries to sell policies. Employers, both public and private, have saddled their foresters with too many other responsibilities and foresters, as a group, have been too easily drawn away from the truly forestry aspects.

I am most familiar with the trends in the federal agencies where there is too much of making photographers, agronomists, economists, trainers, radio specialists, information specialists, personnel specialists, land purchase negotiators, law enforcement officers, business managers, and "what have you" out of foresters. There are a few notable exceptions, but too many foresters have allowed themselves to be diverted into anything that comes along without protest. Also, too many older men have counselled young foresters to get into related rather than real forestry work.

In the state organizations it is much the same and, to a disturbing extent, they are plagued with local, petty politics and pressure from industrial groups. The job is, in many cases, largely one of selling and practicing fire control rather than practice of forestry.

My definite impression of industrial foresters is that too few are engaged in "tree" forestry. They buy land, buy logs and pulpwood, sell forest products, run woods and mill operations, "front" for employers whose forestry consists of having a forester on the payroll, and perform other duties only remotely related to the growing and managing of trees.

The younger men see for themselves that the ones who get ahead are more often those who are in other than management and silvicultural work. The development of competent "tree" foresters and the number of them available, reflects no credit on the profession, industry, or public agencies. Many forests have reached the stage where they should be managed, and it must be done right.

A doctor buries his mistakes, but a poorly handled forest is there to reproach the perpetrator for a long time. Forest owners are looking more and more for advice on handling their property. We can send them fire fighters and administrators, but how many really qualified woodland managers? Take the longleaf pine type for example; how many foresters in the United States are capable of making a good management plan for an area devoted to producing this species? And I don't mean something lifted from a bulletin or text book, and warmed up. Are the profession and the agencies using foresters aware of the deficiency? It is not popular to "view with alarm" but complacency in this regard will be fatal.

Why have these conditions come to pass? Expediency is probably the answer in most cases of public organizations. Inadequate financing and the consequent inability to secure the special types of assistance needed have compelled foresters to do work for which they were not trained and which was not professional forestry. Industrial foresters often suffered from the demand that they show an immediate profit and turned to exploitation rather than conservation. But these reasons have disappeared to some extent and I am afraid we have not taken advantage of the opportunity.

The profession must, of course, take account of the needs of employers for foresters who can function effectively in the executive branches of forestry enterprise, public or private. But forestry, if it is a profession, cannot admit that the road to the top is not also open to expert practitioners of undiluted forestry. This does not mean to long-haired visionaries, but to men who can diagnose and prescribe in accordance with the dictates of good business, good forestry, and the objectives of the owner. Understanding of forest finance is essential, but the forester should not have the responsibility for floating bond issues and promoting appropriations. Training and experience in exploitation make a man a better forester if used to facilitate good forest practice, but too many graduate foresters in the production end have no opportunity to engage in the primary purposes of the profession. The study of simple logging and milling methods should be taught in engineering rather than forestry schools. It is no more forestry, when unrelated to growing of forests, than is building barns or bridges from products of the trees.

I have heard foresters brag about what a good price they bought a tract of land for, how they influenced the vote in a legislature, how many students they had enrolled, or what a fine piece of fire equipment they had developed, but I have yet to see one bursting with pride over a fine job of marking timber. What are we, as foresters, interested in? Some will say I imply too restricted a field, but I will not believe so until we are practicing the kind of forestry possible only for a man working with his trees; free from all of the intriguing side issues which so easily become the main ones. Fire control, "politicking," procurement, buying and trading land, business, organizing, and the like have to be done by someone, but why by foresters? When a railroad company wants to buy land for a right-of-way the land agent does it, not the locating engineer. The surgeon in a hospital does not buy the groceries for the meals of the patients. He specifies what they are to eat but the steward sees that his orders are carried out.

It must also be recognized that there is still a big promotional and extension job to be done in this country and that the foresters will have to take an active part in educating the public and timberland owners. Programs designed to do this should be formulated by experts in the field of moulding public opinion, but the actual preparation and presentation of material requires joint effort. This is the one non-forestry activity from which there can be no escape, and it is very important to the profession that it be pursued.

Any change in emphasis will have to be gradual, since our non-forestry responsibilities cannot be shed overnight. The aims of the profession however, should be in that direction, or we should call ourselves something else. A forester who has land to manage should not feel lacking as a forester if he cannot play all of the instruments in the band. He should be like a player-leader who excels with one instrument but knows what to expect of the others and can keep the ensemble in harmony.

General acceptance of the thesis that the forest technician is "the forgotten man" may not be forthcoming, but there are at least a few who feel that way, and the situation seems to warrant airing to determine just what conditions are. If investigation reveals that they are somewhat as described here, the Society should go on record somewhat as follows :

Foresters are responsible first of all for the orderly handling of forests. The problems are sufficiently complex to require that the average forester have a working knowledge of the basic arts and sciences which apply to the proper management of timber. They may be expected, in addition, to be grounded in the arts and sciences which contribute to the proper use of the other resources of the forest, but not to be expert in them. This knowledge should be sufficient to enable the forester to determine from what fields special services should be drawn and appraise with reasonable assurance, the effectiveness of such assistance.

I am sure this position could be stated in more meaningful language and this is only a start. Assuming such a statement, with the "bugs" eliminated, the profession should set about educating employers on what foresters are trained to do. Instead of shoving the housekeeping job in connection with a forest works program on to the forester, we should say that is not our line of work and should be done by someone trained for it. At the risk of laboring the point, I believe our position should be that taken by a candidate for a position as forester for a paper company several years ago. Each applicant was asked, among other things, regarding his experience in milling and most of them discussed this item at length. One man, however, said, "I understood you wanted a forester. My experience in the production field is very limited, but I believe I can handle your planting and timber management." As a matter of interest, he got the job. Such an attitude would eventually result in a demand for real foresters and opportunities for those who could qualify as such.

J. F. BROOKS,

U.S. Forest Service,
Atlanta, Ga.