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JOHN MACKAY



THE FOREST AND THE NAT- IONAL LIFE

THREE PENCE

THE FOREST AND THE NATIONAL LIFE

FOREWORD

Mr. Mackay's lecture on *The Forest and the National Life* was delivered in the O'Connell Hall, Dublin, on 1st December, 1937, under the auspices of An Rioghacht. It was of such exceptional interest that An Rioghacht, at the request of several who had the privilege of hearing Mr. Mackay, readily agreed to have it printed and published.

The outstanding importance of Forestry in any scheme of national reconstruction gives the whole subject a special significance, more particularly in connection with the still unsolved problem of the Gaeltacht.

Our thanks are due to Mr. F. J. Brandt for the cover design, and to the other good friends whose subscriptions made publication possible.

BRIAN J. McCAFFERY,
President, *An Rioghacht*.

Dublin,
15th February, 1938.

BY

JOHN MACKAY

AUTHOR OF "TRODDEN GOLD," "FORESTRY IN IRELAND," ETC.



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THE FOREST AND THE NATIONAL LIFE.*

THE majority of the coniferous trees that we require for our needs in this island would grow "moored in the rifted rock." But it is not necessary for us so to grow them. We have millions of acres of good forest land, possibly half of it west of the Shannon. We wait, however, have been waiting since 1922, for the scientific survey—to which I will refer again—to tell us to the acre the area of our country that can be a source of profit to the people, only when under trees.

Even the British, little concerned for our economic welfare, collected evidence that, exclusive of unprofitable agriculture, we had 2,000,000 acres of forest land. Yet in this fifteenth year of a native parliament, the statement of the late Minister of Agriculture is repeated, and unchallenged, that our available forest land did not exceed 300,000 acres, or barely sufficient for our lumber requirements. This reference to lumber is not without significance. Even in the great lumber countries of the temperate belt, the forest is no longer spoken of in terms of lumber. The chemist has altered the meaning of the word. Take this island with which we are most concerned, take the single item of employment. A *lumber* forest of 300,000 acres, after eighty years, would give employment to 4,000 men. From the first day of its laying down, a national forest envisaging the *derivatives* of wood, will give employment to tens of thousands; while at maturity, after thirty-five years, the figure of employment should be nearer to 400,000.

* Lecture delivered in the O'Connell Hall, Dublin, under the auspices of An Ríoghacht, 1st December, 1937.

Silence or Truth?

It was easy to entitle this paper. But when I started to prepare it, the question at once confronted me, "Should I tell the whole truth?" I will relate candidly my frame of mind. When your honorary secretary first wrote to me, he said that it was your wish I should approach the forest through the Gaeltacht. But ever since Cromwell established it, the Gaeltacht has been difficult country. It was de-forested with savage ruthlessness, until to-day the elements have reduced 400,000 acres of it to barren useless rock. For a century it has been a chosen theatre, now of neglect, now of experiment, its people purged with nostrums, until the pathos of their helpless resignation is stamped on their bones. The one body, the Congested Districts Board, that ever, within its severe limitations, accomplished service of value was dismissed by a native government. I was touched by fear.

But it was not for any of these reasons that fear touched me. I was afraid because of the silence that enveloped the fundamental relations of all that was real in this country. Truth may be many sided, but mathematical truth, the two and two that make four, had only one facet. If I were to tell that truth, how would it be received? I had read the speeches bearing testimony to our virtues, delivered at scores of impressive gatherings in this very city, and I was afraid of the truth—that the only tangible effect of telling it would be its recoil upon myself. A proverb of that wise and gentle people, the Chinese, came to my mind, "A man who tells the truth is one who is driven out of seven towns." I did not want to be driven out of any town. It was for others to press for the solution of pressing problems. I had no solutions to press of any kind. I was master only of one elemental subject. On the other hand, my whole mind was held by the miracle which *that* elemental thing could work for our people, elemental, because the forest in its chemical aspect was concerned only with the ordered user of the soil

that Providence had bestowed on us. Wood was one of the three major elements of all industry—wood, iron and sea coal. We could not grow iron or soft coal, but we could grow wood. The case for national re-forestation reposed in *elementals*, just as it flowed from reasons to results, from relentless figures to their inevitably following facts. I did not want to let slip this opportunity of presenting its case.

Two Cases for National Re-forestation.

Returning to my subject, I propose at the conclusion of this paper to show some thirty slides illustrating the life, and some of the meanings, of the modern forest. The paper itself falls into two parts, the *negative* and *positive* case respectively for national re-forestation. I take the positive first, because whilst its skeleton figures may thrill—the full, authenticated figures do thrill—it is the negative case, the case which makes its way through the Gaeltacht, that I wish to loom in your mind. Why? Because this negative case, which throws down a challenge to every ambition, every Hellenic mellification upon which we compliment one another, outweighs any figures; because it warns us amongst other things to take care of the Communist, that issue which alarms us, lest with our de-populated acres, our “exile ship” and display of luxury, we are not drawing more water than is in the channel. You see already why I mentioned that Chinese proverb. One thing I would like to say here, that the case for national re-forestation does not need either opinionism, or the testimony of absent witnesses. All its witnesses bear world-names. Such stratagems as, “There is good reason to believe this or that fact about it,” are never needed. Its facts, figures and authorities have historical awareness.

Service Through the Forest.

Whether we regard the philosophy of the beautiful, or of the useful, the dominant note of the forest is service, service

of the living generation, and what is as much our consideration, service of the generations that follow. “What if another sit beneath the shade of the broad elm I planted by the way, have I not done my task and served my kind?” That is the blazon of the forest—service. I would recall an incident, from one of those few great pieces around which the *caller* winds of time for ever blow. When, returning from Troy unrecognised after a ten years’ absence, Ulysses found his aged father, Laertes, planting of trees, he asked him why—being now advanced in years—he put himself to such fatigue and labour. “Friend,” said Laertes, taking Ulysses for a stranger, “I plant against the home-coming of my son—Ulysses.” And if I may provoke you by another instance, paraphrasing Ruskin, “This portion of an island which God has lent us for our lives, is an entail that belongs as much to those that come after us as to us. And we have no right by anything we do, or leave undone, to deprive those not merely of our generation, but those who follow us, of the benefits of that entail.” How, confining ourselves to the forest, and to the land which Nature designed should be under forest, are we acquitting ourselves of that trust?

The Safety Line is Eighteen per cent.

Let us contrast ourselves with other peoples. There are occasions when it is a duty to take stock of what other countries are doing. Regard France. Writing of the deep concern of the French people in their forests, Mr. Theodore Wolsey says, “It is only to be expected in a nation so eminently wise. Moreover, a country with only 18.7 per cent. of forest land, cannot afford to allow further de-forestation. Only decadent nations have no considerable area of valuable forest, either in public or private hands.” And travelling beyond France, let us see how we stand. The safety line of forest cover is accepted as 18 per cent. of total area. So we find Italy with only 16 per cent. feverishly expanding her forest cover. Portugal, more fortunate, has

17 per cent. ; Belgium, 18 ; Switzerland, 22 ; Norway, 23 ; Poland, 24 per cent. ; the United States, 25 ; Germany, 27 ; Yugo-Slavia, 31 per cent. ; Czechoslovakia, 33 ; Austria, 37 ; Ireland, these Twenty-six Counties, 0·29, or less than one-third of one per cent. That, however, is not all the scroll. And this is the pivotal fact of this paper.

Eighty years hence, the total area planted under our present forest programme would not give us two per cent. of forest-cover.

Let me be clear about this latter criticism. The activities of the existing forestry section are not being brought under review here, but any presentation of the case for national re-forestation would indeed be halting, if it allowed certain facts deriving from those activities to pass unnoticed.

Are Irishmen to have only schools like Avondale—only to be employed in fore-castle berths even in our very forests ? Why have the essential faculties in Forestry *not* been instituted and properly state endowed in each of our two Universities, to give to Ireland young Irish forest-officers for this—as it should be—the greatest of productive national services, officers reared in the land with understanding bred in their bones of the people, and of the conditions and needs of their own country ? “When America was about to re-forest,” says Gifford Pinchot, “she could have got foresters at reasonable salaries from twenty countries, but she did not seek their services. She had no use for them. She set herself instead to train Americans.” The adequate provision of higher and secondary forest-education, a co-ordinated agronomical survey of our soil, the creation of a civilian Forestry Commission (unpaid except for its chair and vice-chairman), these most grave national matters cannot be developed in this particular paper.

Continuously I use this word “national,” for the forest soars aloft above all sections, all politicians, all parties, all politics. That is the approach made to it in every land. Naturally so, for a nation’s trees are its chiefest magazine

of wealth and glory. Well did Humbolt say that “the greatest loss a country could sustain was to lose its forests.” England understood this truth. Our forests once destroyed, we no longer counted in the scale of nations. We were counted out. And so, in the evil days of the past, she did not leave standing one single tree of our original Irish pine and spruce. When there was no longer military excuse, she burned what remained of our forests for charcoal. The loss was crushing then, for stripped of its trees the very inspiration departs from a land. But if the loss was then crushing, consider what it means when wood to-day is not merely the raw material of 5,000 separate articles of commerce, but the breath of civilisation. The printed word, not the radio or the forum, is the food of the brain of modern society. And 95 per cent. of the paper on which that word is written and printed comes from the wood-pulp of the forest. To supply a ton of that pulp we have not the trees, and, if Britain can accomplish it, we are not intended to have them.

The romance and value of Wood-pulp.

Let us take a glance at the world-position of this one forest product, wood-pulp, for which there is no conceivable substitute, but to ease the demand on which, the nations are ceaselessly seeking supplementary sources of supply. Every year this demand soars. It soars beyond prediction, certainly beyond what anyone would have dared to predict when I was writing my book on the forest in 1932. Consider the following figures. In 1932, superior fine bleached sulphite was £11 10s. od. a ton. To-day on the London market it is £23. Paper is but one product of wood-pulp. But take paper again. A few years ago the best newsprint—a product of the cheapest pulp—was in the neighbourhood of £8 a ton, then £10, now £11 10s. od. to £12. For next year’s contracts I am informed that the price is already set at £14. And this precious substance, I would beg you to memorise,

is the only one raw material that cannot be mass-produced, the *one major article* of world-trade that we, in this island, are in a position to produce by the million ton, in respect of which there are no quotas, no economic wars.

To me, repeating these things, it feels like advocating the importance of coming in out of the rain, so seven-leagued are the facts. If we had twenty million available acres, there is no comparable undertaking to which, in the circumstances of our country, we could put our hand. But if we have not twenty million acres, we have 3,000,000 acres, an area as it happens that attains the safety line of 18 per cent. of total area.

It may be asked how do I know. I do not know. For fifteen years the appeal for a co-ordinated stock-taking of our natural inheritance has been unheeded. But if I do not know, it is still possible to approximate the area of our country that should be under trees, not *any* trees, those only advantageous to the nation.

Trees in community have a quality within themselves, that invites to instructed investigation of the economic and other claims made for them. Before I give in skeleton, however, the money and employment figures that a forest of 3,000,000 acres represents, a word should, I consider, be said here, concerning the richness and virtue of our country for the production of wood substance. I commit to your reflection what follows.

Trees Flourish in Ireland.

Within the Arctic Circle, at an altitude greater than it is necessary for us to contemplate, are forests which defy the tempests. We have had to travel a thousand miles south to Ireland, to be told by *strangers*—as if we were a parcel of schoolboys—that west of the Shannon the same trees cannot be grown there. The breath is shortened by the daring of the affirmation. I have taken various tests of conifers, some grown on resistant soil above a pan of rock, in the very

teeth of adversity, and found the cubic-content of wood-substance in excess of the highest figure in the British yield-tables. It was precisely to be expected. Ireland has ever been a land of woods. Evidences yet remain of the entrancing forests that once flourished here to the fringe of the western ocean. On the Dingle peninsula their roots may still be seen deep under the Atlantic, where it has eaten its way into parts of the coast line. But I push aside the historic renown of Ireland for its forests. Our concern is with the modern world. And in this modern world every great name, from Nisbet and Munroe Ferguson, has testified to the unmatched soil and climate of Ireland for the practice of large-scale forestry—Ireland the whole of it, Mayo and Wicklow, Leitrim and Offaly, Donegal and Waterford, a hundred thousand acres in most counties of it, treble that area in some.

The particular conifers we need will flourish in any part of Ireland. What has the Englishman, Cook, to say? "It is a favoured isle for the growth of conifers. Trees will flourish there that in Britain, except in exceptional circumstances, completely fail." Naturally, the trained forest-officer—when we have trained him—will not consider it a part of his duty to select Knockboy in Connemara, or the Old Head of Kinsale, for two of his forest nurseries. There is always a way around the wet land. De-forestation has rendered worthless hundreds of thousands of once valuable acres in the Gaeltacht. But some of the finest forest land in Ireland—between one and two million acres of it—still exists in that western territory.

I might take any county of it from Donegal to Kerry. I will choose one district in the heart of it, in Connemara. I am not concerned with what happened in Connemara during the Permian or Triassic periods, or whether it participated in the later general uplift of the Cretaceous system. No forester may undervalue the importance of geology. I mean only that learning, when it lacks the evangelical spirit, can be a blight, not a beneficence. The Connemara that we are

concerned with is that Connemara which, when not prostrate under a festering husbandry, is a shooting domain for Indian princes or British idlers. Start then from Westport for Leenane, and thence onward to Kylemore, Letterfrack and Renvyle, or down again along the valleys on either side the Maamturk mountains, and you will travel through tens upon tens of thousands of Quality-classes I to III forest land. There would be oases of rich pasture scattered here and there, but the forest preserves and cherishes such oases. Why is such land not under its proper cover? Do I need to tell, to speak the sooth?

The Undoing.

I do not presume to teach, *only to give a sign*, to indicate the relations between reality and significance. So I may be excused if I recall to your memory one date, from out the ruthlessness of the past, if I retell what happened on that 26th September, 1653, at the focal point of every town and village in this island, when, to the beat of kettledrums, the Last British Trumpet rang out its hatred of tottering youth and age, and the great trek commenced to what were left of the forests of Connaught, to the Barbadoes, wherever they chose to take themselves. In that past—when a double destruction on land and people was wrought by the Bingham, the Cootes, the Carews (that Sir Charles Coote who had ravaged every square mile of Connaught, to make it ready for the outlawed Gael), in that past, when millions of acres were perverted to a rotting agriculture, when the foundations were laid of our export trade in children, when a “keen” went up from the violated throats of a whole people—in that past was *reality*. Why do I recall that reality? Because for three centuries, from every Kirkintilloch of the Gaelic Diaspora, has come the echo of its *significance*, because the rigours of that terrible winter survive to this passing instant when my voice is sounding in your ears, because a nation is the offspring of its past, because when we forget the signi-

ficance of our past, then the history of this land, save as an air-base, an annexe, can be closed. That is the Undoing of Ireland, which it is our obligation in turn to undo. That is the meaning of national re-foresting, and of the atonement which that re-foresting involves. We can continue to ignore this responsibility of our inheritance, but there is no other alternative.

The Re-making.

And this survey—whose personnel, and the scope of whose reference, is so fearfully vital—this co-ordinated agronomical survey with its maps, that will tell us to the acre the precise regional distribution of our forest land, how much of it is at present under degraded husbandry, how much tacked on in recent years *to increase the size of other worthless holdings*, how much under sheep, how much sheer waste—how long should this survey take to complete its maps and findings? If properly conditioned, not more than twelve months. We will assume that such survey fixes our forest area at 3,000,000 acres, and that immediately following, this land, and the fertile area required to receive those evacuated from it—in all 5,000,000 acres, or 29 per cent. of total area—have been compulsorily controlled.

How many years would it take to plant such an area?

When would such a forest reach maturity?

What would it cost?

How should the expense be met?

What immediate employment would it afford?

What ultimate employment?

What would be the money yield?

The answers given here to these questions must of necessity be in the nature of recording turnstiles. Three million acres can with ease be planted in thirty-five years, the period when the first year's planting comes to maturity. Thirty-five

years to bring a forest to maturity may seem magical to some of us, but in the southern United States, they are harvesting "slash pine" to-day on a rotation of fifteen years. I would wish to emphasize, that once planted there is no second planting.

The cost—which works out at £2,500,000 a year—is properly a revenue charge. We are probably paying in relief to-day, however that relief be disguised, a sum of £7,000,000 a year. Because this work of Reconciliation will see the end of all bounties, all public relief except to the aged, the widowed, and infirm, it is properly a revenue charge.

Immediate employment has been calculated at 45,000. This employment, to which I refer when my slides are being shown, falls into two categories, preparatory forest employment, and the employment which the group re-settlement of 2,000,000 fertile tillage acres will create. The figure excludes the tens of thousands of Irish men and women whom the forest will transfer from slum agriculture to these new group-settlements, each settlement a spearhead of the language movement.

Ultimate employment is also of two kinds: forest employment of 110,000 men, and consequential industrial employment which may be 25,000 or 250,000 according to the response of industry.

Finally, money-yield. From its thirty-fifth year, when felling starts, the forest, through its chemical derivatives, will pay an annual wages bill of £17,000,000 (exclusive of industrial employment), leaving a net profit to the State in excess of the accepted return on business capital. A sense of distrust may attach to categorical affirmation about matters that are contingent, but these figures do not rest on contingencies. In part detail they are set out in "Forestry in Ireland"; and to each one here who feels the urge to become a crusader in this work of Undoing and Remaking,

I take the liberty to commend this book.* To become a crusader it is necessary first to learn about the crusade. The enthusiasm which is founded on indeterminate knowledge is mostly valueless. So, for a few shillings, you can order from your bookseller this book, published at such great expense. But if the forest yielded no profit, if, against universal experience, it merely paid its way, our duty to confront this work of reconciliation is not abated. That is the positive case.

The Negative Case.

Coming to what is styled the negative forest-case, I will be very brief.

Behind the vaunted, ever-increasing velocity of our Bank debits and soaring motor sales, behind the winding horn of our British huntsmen and their following dogs, behind our whole imposing facade of prosperity, what stands? A thousand years ago from hence to Rome men said there was no ground like Ireland, so plenteous to her children, so bounteous, so large, so benignant, so good. Can we still claim that she is so? Here is a sunny land—I quote from no unfriendly source—presenting to the casual eye vistas of ease, restfulness, fragrance, vistas of a lovable people. "Yet as one penetrates deeper, the conviction grows that this pleasing exterior conceals an internal viscus, an organic disorder which, if it affected 300,000,000 of people instead of a bare three million, would witness the convulsion of civilisation."

Let us for one five minutes examine into the possible facts on which this grave charge could rest. I explore three.

You will find in the journal of the Irish Tourist Association for last month, and in its September and November issues of last year, articles under the name of a gentleman who, he informs us, is privileged to expound for English periodicals the sporting attractions of our country. In these articles,

* Cork University Press, 1932, with illustrations and graphs, 5s.

then, you may read of the "wild-fowlers' paradise," to which the Gaeltacht has been reduced, of the empire of shooting—forest land most of it—attached to hotels and private houses from Southern Kerry to Northern Donegal. There you can read where a friend of this captain rented, by the month, a shoot of 6,000 acres for 1s. 2d. per acre, a property as it is described to do what he liked with as his own. But that is not all. In these articles you may read of the still richer potentialities—this gentleman's phrase—of our homeland, how tens of thousands of acres are to be had, virtually for a song, from our Irish Land Commission.

Next, still following up this subject of land-use, we find, if we take Belgium, a country occupying a position of pre-eminence in the fine and dependent arts—Holland furnishes another example—that Belgium has 1,160,000 farmsteads on her 6,000,000 fertile acres. We have not the mineral and other resources of Belgium, yet on 16,000,000 acres in these Twenty-six Counties, the total number of farmsteads, including sub-marginal farms, amounts to just 330,000. But there is another circumstance, to which, with your indulgence, I would draw attention, that the Belgian farmer on his small farm is self-supporting. Do these facts and figures count for *anything*, in that criticism of our country which I have just read?

Third and last, I wonder if any of us here could verify, or refute, the tales told of our emigrés—angashores, I had almost called them—so grateful for a square meal in the Salvation-Army and other shelters of London. But it is not their helplessness—even when employed as the burden bearers of a different civilisation—it is what their loss means to a virile nation that we are called on to realise, an admittedly de-populated country, in which between 50 and 60 per cent. of its adult population would at this hour be on the bread-line but for the "exile-ship." Yet in this de-populated land we possess a soil, that, rightly used equals in goodness the best in the world, a territory some say, that should support

10,000,000, others 12,000,000 inhabitants in the abundance of Christian comfort, but which is *socially* organised to provide such support for a bare 2,000,000, if so many.

Have we the Will to Re-forest?

These are the positive and negative cases respectively, for creating out of this island tucked away in a corner of the world, a *portus salutis*, a safe anchorage for every child of the Gael, a ground that once again from hence to Rome shall prove herself the most plenteous to her children.

And the answer to this Reconciliation? Will it be douce checkmate, an acquiescence that it is all excellent but would need *auctoritas*, some Karl Magnus or Captain Courageous, a thing outside what a practical democratic people could entertain. Democracy is differently valued. To the unscrupulous financier it is the paradise of which he dreams. It is, however, the form of government under which we live. What then of Czechoslovakia, a land of deeds, not words? Its independence was declared in 1918. Within three years, by the end of 1921, not 29 per cent., but 61 per cent. of the whole land of this democratic state had been compulsorily controlled, and the work consequent on that control completed, all its forests and the group-resettlement of over 9,000,000 acres of its pasture and tillage. One point before I conclude.

Organisation and Order.

National foresting, only on an *immensely* vaster scale, stands in the one category with every other State industrial undertaking, sugar, electricity, peat. The immediate overriding necessity then is organisation, organisation to familiarise the people with this industrial theme, and to have its control removed from the administrative sphere of Departmentalism, to place it where it belongs, a living organism of the nation. Please do not misunderstand me. I am not animadverting departmentalism, only that the forest belongs elsewhere.

Beyond the evacuation of sub-marginal land, the forest

does not encroach, *even* on the British legacy to us of our livestock trade. It encroaches on nothing. Its office is service, but I do not suggest its service promises a millenium. It promises only, that in increasing the productiveness of the earth, is to be found the true source of order and wealth. It postulates only, that the first principle of social-science is the natural user of a nation's soil. It avers only, that the inevitable results flowing from the work, which national foresting involves, will close the history of the "exile ship"; opening to every child of this country the full life that comes from steady, honourable, remunerative employment. It promises these *blessings* to them as a right. The present social organisation of this land is a denial of that right.

(THE LEAGUE OF THE KINGSHIP OF CHRIST)

An Rioghacht was founded in Dublin on the day of the first celebration of the Feast of Jesus Christ the King, 31st October, 1926. The name *An Rioghacht* (the *Kingdom* or the *Kingship*) indicates the purpose of the League, which is to assist in the work of re-establishing the Social Reign of Christ the King in Irish public life. Its immediate objects are:—

- (a) To propagare among the Irish people a better knowledge of Catholic Social principles.
- (b) To strive for the effective recognition of these principles in Irish public life.
- (c) To promote Catholic Social action.

While taking for granted the principles of Irish nationality, *An Rioghacht* is not associated with any political party, and takes no part in political controversy or activities except when and in so far as the immediate objects of the League (*viz.*, Catholic Social interests) are involved.

The members are of three grades, *viz.*, *Associates*, who have made a study of Catholic Social principles, and are eligible to form the central governing body; *Aspirants*, who aim at becoming Associates; and *Assistants*, who help in the work of *An Rioghacht* without aspiring to become Associates.

The central governing body of *An Rioghacht* is the *Ard Fheis*, or general congress, composed exclusively of members of the Associate grade. The ordinary work of the organisation is carried on by the *Ard Chomhairle*, or governing council, which is elected annually by the *Ard Fheis*.

The following are amongst the means proposed or adopted by *An Rioghacht* for attaining its objects:—

- (a) The establishment of study circles, where members can work through a systematic course of Social Science under competent lecturers.
- (b) Public lectures.
- (c) The publication of pamphlets and books, as well as articles in current reviews and magazines.
- (d) The encouragement and support of other Catholic organisations engaged in works of a constructive nature such as the promotion of Catholic libraries, co-operative credit societies, home industries, after-care of boys and girls, etc.

Further information may be obtained on application to the Hon. Secretary, *An Rioghacht*, 42 Upper O'Connell Street, Dublin.