

Rebuilding the Scottish Woodlands

By Col. John Sutherland, Assistant Forestry Commissioner.

Britain is the largest wood importer in the world, and it is a striking fact that so little effort has been made in the past to help to meet the demand for timber by increased production within the country. Greater Britain or the British Empire is potentially the largest timber producing unity among the nations. The almost unbounded resources which the Empire possesses in all parts of the world need only be scientifically developed and conserved in order to ensure our future supplies and to remove all apprehension of a timber famine. The Mother Country has undoubtedly lagged behind the Dominions and the Colonies in matters of forest production and conservation. Of her 121,380 square miles barely 4 per cent. has been under forest in recent times; still the earliest records show that once upon a time Great Britain was a densely wooded country. Forestry development has not kept pace with other industrial enterprise. Britain owes her supremacy to her insular position and to the development of her Navy and mercantile marine. Her many excellent ports and the ease with which timber could be brought from over the seas made it seem unnecessary to attend to home resources in timber supplies, but a visit to Scotland to-day will disclose the importance of never again being caught without an adequate reserve of all the natural resources which can be developed within our shores.

The upper plains, hillsides, and low-lying valley slopes, which five years ago were covered with trees, are now bare, and too often covered with the debris of the exploiters. This state of matters, while of the nature of a calamity, has not altogether been devoid of good. The War manifests the importance of timber and the necessity of securing within the country a supply of wood sufficient to make Britain more independent of other countries.

At one time the whole of Scotland, and especially that part lying north of a line drawn between Edinburgh and Glasgow, was covered with dense forest. To

what altitude the forest grew is more or less a matter of conjecture, but traces of large trees are found at elevations of 1,600 to 1,700 feet, and in some ascertained cases even 2,000 feet above the level of the sea. The condition of the country, covered as it was by wood, protected the inhabitants from invasion, and while sheltering them, facilitated their raiding hostilities upon the Lowlands. When the Romans invaded in the third century they employed over 50,000 men in destroying and opening up the forests for the purpose of driving out the inhabitants who resisted their advance, and as indicative of the character of the land they called the people Caledonii, a name latinised by them from the Gaelic "Na Caoilldaoine," which means "the men of the woods."

The devastation of the forests was not confined to the invader, for the rival sects and clans, retarded in their conquering aims by the woodland cover of their neighbouring enemies, took means of destroying by fire wide forest tracts throughout the whole country. Also in Cromwell's time vast areas, especially in the Scottish Borders, were laid waste by fire for military purposes. In the early days also serious inroads were made by extensive fellings,—for example, in the time of Edward III., during the first half of the fourteenth century; in order to raise revenue for the prosecution of the French wars, Henry VIII, in the sixteenth century; James I, a hundred years later, and Charles I, all helped to reduce the forest area either for colonisation schemes or for the sake of revenue. Still it is on record that both Henry VIII. and James I. encouraged planting as an important factor in national economy.

The Forestry Commission Programme for Scotland is under review, but it is generally anticipated that during the ensuing ten years 75,000 acres will be planted by the State; that 25,000 acres may be afforested through loans or other schemes in co-operation with local authorities and private owners, and that a similar area may be restored to trees in