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Work of the Forestry Commission :
Progress and Promise.

II.

IN view of the fact that the first ten-years period of the Forestry Commissioners' work was to expire at the end of March 1929 and that a new grant to continue the work would have to be obtained from Parliament, the Commissioners in 1927 discussed with the Government the question of a forest policy for Great Britain under the heads (1) general forest policy, (2) programme for the second decade (being an instalment of policy) which the country was in a position to undertake.

Under the question of a general forest policy the Commissioners held that in order to ensure a supply of home-grown timber (both softwood and hardwood) adequate for the normal well-being of the nation and for safety in time of national emergency, it was necessary to proceed steadily with the afforestation of uncultivated land and the improvement of existing woodlands (almost totally neglected during the first decade). A census of existing woodlands was published by the Commissioners in 1924. An analysis of this most valuable and interesting report showed that the acreage of hardwoods in Great Britain was depreciating, and that the existing woods and the areas which had been felled were in a far from satisfactory position—that, in fact, there was little chance of the private proprietor being able to undertake the work.

In the forecast of the present decade's work, it is stated : " It had been hoped that the first decade would witness the planting up of arrears of fellings accumulated during the War, and the second (decade) improvement of existing woodlands and a large extension of the area under forest. These expectations are very unlikely to be realised." This statement is a most surprising one to find in the report. From 1922 onwards it must have been patent to the Commissioners, several of them important landowners, that the heavy taxation and death duties would make it impossible for the private owner to do much to assist the reafforestation of the areas felled during the War. Further, the Commissioners presumably had at their disposition official statistics showing the position of the country generally *vis-à-vis* taxation, the break-up of estates, and so forth. All that was needed was a broad forestry administrative experience to point the way to efficient handling of a difficult position.

The Commission, however, was tied to a fixed annual coniferous planting programme. This next

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decade it is again tying itself down in a similar fashion. There have already been many complaints throughout the country on the neglect to replant hardwood areas throughout the first decade, an insignificant 7000 acres being the total area dealt with by the Commissioners. The latter comment upon the difficulty of dealing with the owners of such areas, touch upon the possibility of asking for powers for compulsory acquisition, etc. But the proposed programme definitely shows preoccupation with the coniferous planting programme and a lukewarm attitude towards the existing forest or, better expressed, woodland areas, throughout the country—whether felled during the War, exploited since 1919, or being exploited (as are many oak woods) at the present time. Owing to the neglect of the areas felled during the War, they have now been lying disforested for at least twelve years; the forest soil has deteriorated by that period of years; the surface is covered with a heavy weed growth, which will be expensive (and is proving so) to remove. The Commission has offered grants to private proprietors to assist in the replanting of such areas, but admit the practical failure of this policy.

The ten-year forecast furnishes no evidence that the Commissioners have advanced any further towards a solution of this important matter. It would appear that they intend to allow the bulk of these areas, possessing a true forest soil, to remain for twenty years unplanted; whilst they purchase elsewhere bare areas of necessarily poorer soil, to grow a coniferous crop, of problematical value at the end of a first rotation. Surely the Commissioners realise that the discovery of a solution of this very urgent problem rests at their door. At present they do not appear to have got further than the suggested possible course of asking Parliament for compulsory powers to acquire such areas. It may be suggested that such a step would not unlikely prove widely unpopular and would do serious damage to the cause of forestry in Britain.

That the value of the Commissioners' work since 1919 is recognised by Parliament is evidenced by the grants made for the next decade. At the instance of the late Conservative administration, Parliament voted a sum of £5,500,000 into the Forestry Fund, commencing from April 1, 1929. This sum was increased by the succeeding Labour Government to £9,000,000. Forest receipts during the decade are estimated at £2,160,000—giving a total sum for expenditure during the period of £11,160,000.

For forestry operations the estimated cost for the decade is slightly more than £8,000,000. Provision

is made for the acquisition of plantable land at a uniform rate of 60,000 acres a year. The total planting programme is placed at 353,000 acres, made up of 330,000 acres of afforestation and 23,000 acres of replacements—that is, of replanting existing plantations! It is proposed to continue the system of planting grants, and it is anticipated that between £140,000 and £150,000 may be expended on this work during the decade. On the subject of forest workers' holdings, it is laid down that 3000 will be established during the period, at an average cost of approximately £625 each. Education and research are each to have allotted £100,000, and special services £20,000.

The objects and aims of a forest policy in a country are not necessarily always involved in direct revenue returns in cash. The indirect returns, in so far as they are advantageous to the community at large, may have a higher value. In Britain it is this latter point of view which must govern the forestry question for some time to come. So far as can be judged in these very difficult times, the grants made by Parliament may, through the indirect benefits accruing to the people, be fully justified, and the public may be obtaining a full return for the money expended. Future generations will be able to give the true answer. But it is believed that the advent of the Commissioners and of their work has already proved of benefit to the community on the countryside. The second decade of their activities would be of even greater value to the country as a whole, if the Commissioners would tear up the Acland Report—of admitted value in its day, up to a certain point—and adopt a wider vision and broader principles of forest administration.

Physiographic Evolution of Britain.

The Physiographical Evolution of Britain. By Dr. L. J. Wills. Pp. viii + 376. (London: Edward Arnold and Co., 1929.) 21s. net.

IT is one of the primary aims of stratigraphical geology to integrate into a picture or chart the results of the mapping of rocks or deposits and the palæontology of each noteworthy geological period. From the early years of the last century, if no earlier, the pioneers such as Lyell and Trimmer had resorted to this method of portrayal, and the device has been employed by many, perhaps most, of their successors. Some have been content to represent an 'ideal landscape' or a restoration of the assumed distribution of land and water at some specific period of