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FORESTRY

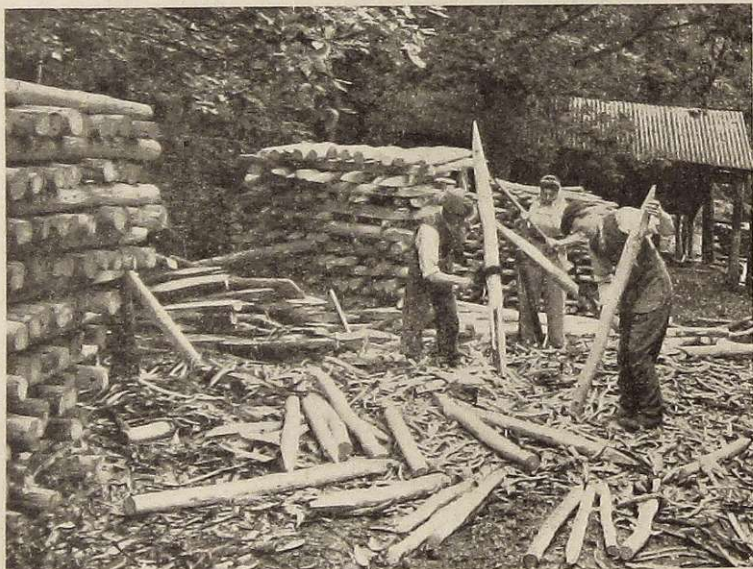


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I.

THE STORY OF OUR FORESTS

In former times Britain was a land of forests. Though there were moors on the hills and marshes in the lowlands, the woods covered most of the country. Some stretches of these forests were made up of a single kind of tree, whilst in others many kinds grew mingled together. Oaks, like those seen in picture No. 1, grew well on the fertile well-drained soils of the lowlands, especially on the clay, but in the windswept north and west the oak trees were scrubby, stunted and scattered. Amongst them, in many districts, grew birches, beeches, alders, ash and yew trees, which in places formed woods purely of their own kind. Rarer trees were lime, whitebeam, wild cherry, certain elms and poplars, with many shrubs and smaller trees growing amidst the taller giants of the woodlands. In Scotland, Ireland and northern England great forests of Scots pine clothed the hills.

Only scattered relics of those old, natural woods remain. Man has destroyed the rest, though he has also done something to replace them. The first men in Britain were hunters, who found their food in the forests and, if we except the danger from fire, did little or nothing to harm them. When, however, men began to domesticate the animals and to pasture flocks of sheep and herds of cattle, the gradual destruction of the woods began. For the animals ate the *saplings* (young trees), destroying them faster than they could be replaced by seedlings. Later still, when man became a cultivator as well as a grazier, land had to be cleared to make way for the crops, and this continued throughout historical times until nearly all our natural forests had disappeared.

It took a long time for people to realize that they would be poorer without their forests. Most of our land is needed for grazing or for growing crops, but trees, though few of them give us food, supply other things that are just as necessary for our well-being. Wood is needed for building the houses that shelter us, for making furniture and many of our tools, for farm fences and gates, and the building of fishermen's boats. It comes to us in the altered form of papers carrying the day's news, or as plastics and artificial silk. The coal we burn is mined with its help, the trains we travel in run over wooden sleepers, and wooden telegraph poles help to carry our messages.

Moreover, the growth of forests affects the soil and climate in helpful ways. The tree roots, and the leaf mould that