

OBITUARY

CECIL McLEAN SMITH (1892-1961)

The death of C. M. Smith in May last marks the passing of one who used his tremendous talents to serve New Zealand well in many fields. Born in Otago, where he graduated Master of Arts, Smith was progressively student, teacher, soldier, forester, philosopher – but always and essentially a student, a teacher and a man.

He will best be remembered for the 20-year period (1930-1950) he spent as Chief Inspector of the Forest Service; a period which saw the phenomenal upsurge of exotic afforestation and the beginnings of large scale silvicultural and utilization activities. With his overseas experience, his encyclopædic knowledge of New Zealand plant ecology, and his keenly analytical mind, Smith foresaw and foretold many of the problems that would inevitably result from the creation of extensive mono-cultures planted with little regard to climate, soils or provenance. And so far as was humanly possible in the climate of his times, he fought manfully to keep New Zealand forestry on sound scientific lines, and to avoid the pitfalls so readily induced by the pressures of public enthusiasm, which often bear heavily on those employed in State-controlled forestry. Present day foresters can – and often do – reflect somewhat wryly that had “C.M.” had his way there would be less need now to practice what he himself aciduously termed “aberrant forestry”.

As an author, C. M. Smith earned world-wide prestige. His works are and will always be a delight to read and re-read: models of clear-thinking and lucid exposition, and a complete answer to the incipient heresy based on “inarticulate foresters”. This Journal has been enriched throughout its lifetime by the learning and the generosity of C. M. Smith; no regular contributor will be more sorely missed. Readers will find in this issue a treatise from his pen on a problem which perennially bedevils all practising foresters: “The Standing Timber Market”. Although written some ten years ago, today it gives an up-to-the-minute coverage of a complex and contentious subject, interpreted with that depth of perspective possessed only by the true historian.

C. M. Smith's career was not noteworthy for its even tenor. But as those who were his close associates will know, his major personal triumphs were in the part he played in stimulating the younger generation by his advocacy in season and out of “sound forestry”. It can be said that he had many triumphs in this direction; though he would have been the first to become abusive at any attempt by one of his beneficiaries to express gratitude. That generation, now sadly not-so-young, will never forget an outstanding character for his professional integrity and implacable adherence to principle. And as he in his time borrowed from *Hamlet* to speak of A. W. Wastney, so can we truly say of Cecil McLean Smith: “Take him for all in all, I shall not look upon his like again.”

– D.K.