



## CHAPTER VIII

## FORESTS

214. We have limited our enquiries regarding the forest lands of British India to an examination of the uses at present made of such of them as are under the management of the Forest Department for agricultural purposes in providing fodder for livestock, fuel and timber for the rural population, and protection for soils liable to erosion. There appear to be directions in which these uses might be considerably extended. Before stating the views we have reached on the subject, it will be convenient to give a brief account of the extent and distribution of these lands and of the declared policy of Government in regard to their use for agricultural purposes.

215. As the Table we give below shows, rather more than twenty per cent of the area of British India is classified as land notified under the Indian Forest Act and administered by the Forest Department. This percentage would be slightly increased if forest areas in charge of other departments, and the few privately owned forests, were included.

In a circular issued by the Government of India in 1894, the forests of India were broadly classed under four heads; forests the preservation of which is essential on climatic or physical grounds; forests which afford a supply of valuable timbers for commercial purposes; minor forests which include tracts which, though true forests, produce only the inferior sorts of timber or the smaller growths of the better sorts; and pastures and grazing ground proper which are usually forests only in name. If the forest area under the management of the Forest Department were all wooded and evenly distributed over the country, it would be sufficient to supply all the needs of the agricultural community, if those needs may be measured by the proportion between forests and cultivation usually held to be desirable in other countries. Unfortunately, much of the area consists of waste ground, often entirely devoid of trees, sometimes indeed of vegetation of any kind. Further, the distribution of the forest area as between province and province is markedly irregular, as the following Table will show:—

*Forest lands notified under the Indian Forest Act and administered by the Forest Department in 1925-26*

Province 1	Area of province 2	Area of forest lands				Percentage of col. 6 to col. 2 7
		Reserved 3	Protected 4	Unclassed 5	Total 6	
	sq. miles	sq. miles	sq. miles	sq. miles	sq. miles	
Assam .. .. .	51,825	5,957	.....	14,814	20,771	40.0
Bengal .. .. .	76,755	5,278	1,806	3,445	10,529	13.7
Bihar and Orissa .. .. .	82,939	1,785	994	1	2,780	3.3

\* Circular No. 22-F, dated 19th October 1894 (vide Appendix V).