TREES IN IRELAND.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE IRISH TIMES.

SIR,—Here is a unique letter. It deals with a subject of the greatest importance to the country; yet it neither addresses, advises nor admonishes the Government. It merely calls for co-operation about a matter which is well within our own reach—tree-planting. For those who do not realise the importance of this, and the benefit which both the people and the climate may derive from afforestation, an example will suffice and save space. In Germany the public highways and the railway embankments are lined by fruit trees (apples, pears, plums), planted about a dozen yards apart. The trees this year have to be propped up to bear their yield of fruit. The mountains are covered with forests of pine, plane, chestnut and oak. The fruit trees provide cider made of apples and pears. The plums are split, stoned and used on bread. In Germany they do not rear children on stewed tea and margarine. The vitamines, on which growth depends, are absent in these, but present in fruit.

What is the result of the afforestation? First, cheap raw material; therefore, large houses and beautiful furniture; for elaboration follows when the *materia prima* is abundant. Since the war there are few two-roomed thatched huts in Germany. Little mountain villages are composed of eight-roomed houses with high gables. The sexes are separated; there is room for the children to study, a drawingroom for the housewife, in which she may gather her heir-looms and ornamental things. The walls are panelled, the floors parqueted, and the furniture stained to show the grain by coloured varnishes. All this means comfort and beauty—a chance for progress, high-grade civilisation.

How is the fruit preserved from thieves? "We grow no thieves," the German replies. If people take communal property, they take from themselves. The apples are protected from school-boys and such in the same way as potatoes and grass are protected in Ireland—by being common.

The effect of forests on the climate of a country cannot be shortly explained. Dr. Henry, our eminent authority, can tell how cattle are sheltered and their milk yield increased by trees; waste land enhanced and bogs actually dried until the surface of a marsh shrinks to dry powdery peat by their action. He can show where useless land in Wicklow has been planted with Douglas fir, and in seventeen years has become worth £120 an acre, allowing two shillings for every fifty-foot tree. This means that land fit only for grazing geese or goats, is made to pay £7 a year *per* acre. Yet less than 3 *per* cent. of the surface of Ireland is afforested. Under British rule there was no law to prevent stripping the little that remains. Germany is a political mosaic, but an industrial unit; and revolutions there do not cost the country more in a week than the aims of their fomenters could repair in a generation.

But here what is to be done? Let us ask the railway companies to allow volunteers to plant with fruit trees their waste embankments as far as possible next month. If this were done, the railway companies would be producing something even during a strike. Two men can plant thirty trees in an hour. On the embankments these will be protected from cattle; and, surely, it can serve no political purpose to destroy young fruit trees; but, if they be cut down, they may still be useful if the effect is the same on the veracity of their destroyers as the cutting of the tree by George Washington was confessed to have had on him. So much for fruit trees.

Regarding afforestation, the following proposal is not for the moment addressed to the poor man, but to the man who, by the investments abroad, have kept him poor. If, instead of considering shares in orange groves or apple orchards in South Africa, every man with a motor car were to buy three or four acres of waste land in Wicklow, and drive his planters out and in for a few weeks, he would be sure of a yield in twenty years which would be safer and more beneficial to the country and himself than any insurance policy. A hundred such men co-operating would enrich a countryside.

Instead of being (in the Midlands) one of the ugliest and most ill-kempt countries in Europe, Ireland would be transformed in a decade. The climate would change, and with it the character of the people. Road-sides that grow wasteful ash and useless elder would be trim and productive with the apple, pear and plum. Monotony could be varied by the poplar and sorb-apple tree. The hills of Eire would be fair once more. The plains of our country would have much-needed shelter; and they who would inhabit them would be purposeful and calm; for how can people be calm who live in a wind-swept region, or equable in a climate that is always changing? Harsh gales would be less frequent, the marshes would be drained and rivers kept at a level. They who live in Ireland then will be less subject to brain-storms and emotional extremes. They will live placider in milder air, and from their literature and oratory there will be a dying down of wind.—Yours, etc.,

OLIVER ST. JOHN GOGARTY.

Ely place, Dublin, October 28th, 1922.