AMERICA, THE PRODIGAL: THE POSSIBILITY OF A FAMINE IN WOOD AND WHAT CAN BE DONE TO AVERT IT: BY CHARLES R. LAMB, SECRETARY OF THE AMERICAN TREE PLANTING ASSOCIATION

"Often the man sat under the tree, and always its shade and the sweetness thereof stimulated in him the process of thought. But one day some persons came and cut the tree down and ground it up into pulp of which they made books. And the reading of these, indispensable to culture in the accepted sense, left the man no time to think."—Puck.

UNFORTUNATELY for our country it is not only the man who has migrated from the shade tree to the library who has ceased the needful and rare process of thinking. But from one end of the country to the other it is the man who has cut down the tree who presents himself as a spectacle of the unthinking prodigal so far as the welfare of his land is concerned. Up to the present decade we have been the most extravagant and reckless of all countries in the wasting of our natural heritage. Perhaps it is because we have had no part in the creating of our resources that we have cared nothing for their protection. Never having planted or tended trees, we have developed no affection for our wonderful forests; not having grown up close to them we have gathered no traditions or legends from our deep green woods; we have never entered their wonderful hushed sweetness with reverent, memory-clad feet; there are no fairies or heroes on the heights of our hillsides or in the depths of our valleys to hold back our iconoclastic greedy spirit.

And we have done no better by our wild kindred than by our forests. We have slaughtered the most beautiful of our wild animals recklessly to wear them; our now extinct birds have rested in the most widespread fashion on feminine heads. As for the natural beauty of our land,—what have we cared for it? Our picturesque river fronts are but holes and blotches; our wonderful water-sheds are barren hillsides, our water courses are drained and polluted.

But to return to the tree question: Have we ever thought, stopped long enough in our pursuit of gain to try to understand, what the wood-
land of a country means to the beauty of that country? Why, our
forests are the very physiognomy of the land; they create from one
stretch of country to another the various different personalities.
They are a part of the romance of every hillside and lane and home-
stead from Maine to California.

We need our trees as we need our friends, new and old, for their
joy and their beauty, and as a nation we have not treated these very
gracious friends with much appreciation of their value and charm.
We have sacrificed them for every kind of greed and unscrupulous
opportunity. We have ignored their beautiful purpose in life; we
have sold a marvelous birthright for a very foolish little mess of gold
pottage.

And now at last that we are waking up, we discover our forests de-
nuded, our springs wasted; we find barren stretches of land, cruel
empty valleys; we are even threatened with the prospect of water
famine. From the Atlantic to the Pacific the country cries out for
readjustment; for the protection of our wild animals, and for the
reforestation of our hills and valleys.

The methods of tree planting heretofore in use have been, first, the
individual house owner planting on his own property; second, the
planting of trees along the streetway by real estate owners appre-
ciating trees as an improvement to property intended for sale; third,
the donating of trees to be planted under the direction of the Tree
Planting Association by generous people believing that the tree is
essential not only to the beauty but to the health of the city,—one
donor, for example, last year paying for one hundred trees and their
proper installation,—and to these methods must be added the work
of the Park Departments which have heretofore practically restricted
their efforts to the parks themselves, although within recent years
many streets called parkways have been placed under their juris-
diction.

The recent tardy recognition on the part of the United States
of the genius of that great engineer, L’Enfant, who, under the direc-
tion of the first President, Washington, laid out the city of that name,
brings at this time direct attention again to the beauty of the city of
Washington, and when that beauty is analyzed a very large pro-
portion of it is in the location and the planting, particularly with
trees, of the parkways and the wonderfully intelligent addition of
trees throughout all the streets. No street has less than a line of
trees on either sidewalk; most streets have double rows and in some
of the wider avenues triple and quadruple rows.

To those of us who believe in the Peace Conference, it is a satis-
faction to give credit to the War Department, upon whose shoulders rests the responsibility of the control (owing to the military necessities, so considered) of the main streets and boulevards of Washington. Theoretically, the streets are to be cleared so that cannon can control them from end to end, but in the interim theories are set aside and the streets have been planted in the past, and today are a joy to everyone whose love for nature still remains in spite of city walls.

The method of control of tree planting is obviously one that must be centralized, and no better form has been devised than to place all city trees under the care of the Park Department, assuming, as naturally one must, that competent expert advice is or will be employed to bear the responsibilities of such oversight. The Honorable Henry Smith, the present intelligent Park Commissioner of Manhattan and the Bronx, found on taking up his work that the question of soil was one for which no standard had been established by the city, and any kind of dirt was apparently considered good enough for park or parkway. His insistence upon a standard of soil and the proper regulations regarding the use of such soil will make a distinct improvement in the growth of the trees during the next decade, and his intelligent use of the minor sums, that have been given to his department, in replacing the old trees with new, as well as repairing and trying to save as many of the old trees as possible, will mean that when eventually these old trees will have to be removed, the young ones will be found approaching maturity, furnishing beauty and shade.

There will, however, never be a satisfactorily planted street in our city or in any other until either the very autocratic system of a centralized government, like Washington, is followed, or the laws are so recast that a city itself can (under proper regulations) authorize the planting of trees throughout an entire street, indicating the regular points along the sidewalk for such planting, controlling the selection of the trees as to those best adapted to thrive under city conditions, and finally making the charge for the trees, either as an assessment against the property in front of which the trees stand, or a general assessment against all the property along the street so beautified.

Fortunately, a large variety of trees can be selected which will comply with city conditions, and thus the personal preference of the house owner can in a great measure be realized. There are, however, certain trees which should never be planted, and the veto power necessary must rest with those in authority who are experts. We all know of the plague of caterpillars which came to our mothers and grandmothers in the days gone by as a result of planting the ailanthus tree (beloved of all squirming things) in many localities of New York.
IF WE had had even a little care of our trees we would not need to make such a strenuous plea for their replanting in city and country, but no prodigal ever wasted his patrimony more wantonly and heedlessly than has this great country, whose three thousand or more miles from east to west and two thousand or more miles from north to south held less than two hundred years ago successive groups of virgin forest. And today, as a matter of fact, we are all but facing a tree famine. And this matter of wholesale destruction has not been merely to satisfy our needs, such as the construction of dwellings and furnishings and the multiplied uses of wood, as, for instance, the wood pulp form, for which millions of feet of timber are cut annually. The loss has been largely through waste and negligence; from careless lumbermen and through forest fires which could have been prevented. It is probably only since the appointment of such an expert authority on forestry as Gifford Pinchot at the head of the Department of Forestry that any real consideration has been given to the need of caring for our trees and the planting for succeeding generations, and even today in no Government report that we are familiar with can be found an emphasis laid on our lumber output, to dignify it commercially as a crop of annual harvesting. “King Cotton,” we know, and the grain of the West is quoted daily in the market-places as to the quality of the crop and its price. Corn, rice and all the great staples are calculated bushel by bushel, and prosperity is prophesied according to the millions of bushels in each case that the prophets think may be obtained. Dame Nature’s consideration of our needs along these lines is the theme of business man and statistician, student of economics and poet, but no one has yet spoken or written authoritatively about the lumber “output,” or the enormous value that the country would realize by an intelligent planting of our waste areas in the interests of the tree crop. When our farmers and other business men realize the tree as a national asset and the advisability of planting for the future, that by so doing they are making better investments for their descendants than by placing money in the savings banks, then will we commence to have quoted as of definite importance among the revenues of our country the reports of our wood harvests from month to month, which will probably lead in a short time to the intelligent utilization of areas now unproductive in many cases. Such quotations will be found to be increasing in value yearly, so that within the near future our woods will be recognized with our cotton and the grain exports as a standard asset.

It has been occasionally my privilege in considering the necessities of such great corporations as the railroads, with reference to their annual wood requirement, to suggest to many the possibility of securing
Tree Planting along "Rights of Way."

PRACTICAL PLAN FOR PLANTING TREES ALONG RAILROAD TRACKS, WHICH WILL BENEFIT BOTH PUBLIC AND CORPORATION: SUGGESTION BY CHARLES R. LAMB.
A Picturesque Highway Through a Country Section, with the road flanked on either side by a double row of trees: Suggestion by Charles R. Lamb.
A double row of trees planted along the towpath of a canal, which will act not merely as a wind-break and shade but as a forest reservation. Suggestion by Charles R. Lamb.
Tree Planting along "Rights of Way."

System of tree planting along the river front, a double row of trees to be cultivated for profit as well as picturesque effect; suggestion by Charles R. Lamb.
the wood needed for railroad ties, for station building, for improvements in and around each of such buildings, by a system of planting along their “right of way,” so that the tracks and roadways will be improved by the beauty of the trees and their foliage, and the trees themselves so planted in double or triple lines that one line can be harvested as the other is growing to take its place. In other words, if trees are planted in lines of five years apart, when one tree has reached maturity the next tree will be approaching it and the younger tree of the third line will be arriving at middle age, each to be replaced by the succeeding plantings.

This suggestion is intended to form a working agreement between the railroads and the public by which the latter for the “right of way” given will in turn be considered as the original owners in said “right of way,” and to whom as grantors the grantee shall realize the moral obligation in the beautification of the roadway by tree planting, as well as the general responsibility to the nation at large for the minimum destruction of forests through the necessary demands of wood for railway construction.

If the public understands that corporations, wherever they are under obligations to the State or Government, shall consider tree planting as an essential to “rights of way,” the corollary follows that the public at large shall through its own machinery, either State or Government, recognize its responsibility to the “rights of way” over which it has absolute control.

The good roads movement is recognized by all States. As far as roadbeds are concerned it is an intelligent movement, but nowhere as yet in this country has the good roads movement included as an integral part of its development the systematic, persistent and artistic planting of trees. Another sketch is therefore shown to indicate a great highway through the country sections, flanked on either side by double rows of trees, thus giving adequate shadow to the pathways and breaking the sunlight picturesquely across the roadbed itself. Again the idea is to be borne in mind that the intelligent planting of trees presupposes their harvesting, and that the lumber so secured will come back as a definite asset to the State treasury. To do this merely means that the planting shall be at such periods of time that the removal of one entire line or alternating trees in each line will not interfere with the effect from the landscape point of view.

Another and very important “right of way” in many States and notably in the Empire State, is the canals. Here again the control is vested in the State Government and it is quite within the province
of the Administration to plant on either side of the towpath, trees which in turn will act not merely as windbreaks and shade to the passing tow men, but also as a forest reservation would, permitting again the harvesting yearly of timber when ripe for the axe.

The fourth sketch which I have prepared indicates another opportunity for communities, both in city, town and State, to plant avenues of trees and to cultivate these for profit as well as for the picturesque effect of the foliage itself. And this is along our riverways, again the "right of way," the oldest right of way that we have, that of our rivers and smaller streams. Before railroads existed, before high roads were built, before even trails were beaten through the forests, the rivers and the streams naturally became the lines of communication. The forests have disappeared before the march of so-called civilization, and today the beauty of the banks in nearly all cases has been destroyed. The opportunity to reëstablish on firm economic lines an intelligent compromise between the virgin forest of yesterday and the dreary desolation of today is indicated in the last suggestion. Economic consideration must be the basis of any permanent movement for the beautification of every community. "Art for art's sake" is a slogan that personally I would never care to use. "Beauty as a civic asset" is distinctly preferable. When preaching the gospel of tree planting it will be found that the maximum result will be secured where the economic necessities of wood for manufacturing and other purposes are recognized. Then the sentiment surrounding the tree, which unfortunately too often becomes sentimentality, shall be set aside in the interests of the cultivation, and the harvesting of trees upon a frank recognition of the necessity of such harvesting be accepted, but with an intelligent scheme of planting by which the ghastly wastes of a denuded land, such as the Adirondacks, shall not lie upon the conscience of a great commonwealth. "Woodman, spare that tree," was a poetic protest not as against the sacrifice of a national forest, but as against the destruction of a single tree, a tree if of noble proportion and healthy growth that may have been entitled to its prolonged life; but too frequently trees are permitted by inattention and neglect to decay and become unsightly and unsafe and lose their artistic charm and individual character. Then we should have the surgeon's knife, the intelligent use of the axe and the substitution of young tree growth, which in turn shall become the greater tree, replacing in due course the one thus removed. The fetish against touching any tree is as much to be protested against as the wholesale destruction of all trees. No satisfactory results will be secured either on the part of the Government, State or municipality or even by private action until trees shall be
considered as any other natural growth, planted with due regard to climatic conditions, to consideration of soil, to time of development for each tree in its own group or classification, the proper husbanding of the trees during the process of their growth, and finally the proper disposal of the trees at the period when the wood is at its best for man's use in the arts and crafts.

The beauty of wood in construction, its possibilities of utilization and variety in color have never fully been considered at any period of the world's history; possibly because in each country or nation certain restrictions governed by climatic conditions, primarily, have placed but a few kinds of wood, but a few colors on the palette, so to speak, of the craftsman. But today these conditions have changed in a marked degree by the development in this country at least, of the growth of many woods of many lands. Fortunately within our great territory nearly all temperatures are represented, and there are varied climatic conditions which would make possible the fir tree of Norway and almost in our Southern borders the palm of the tropics. The hard woods of the islands, the mahoganies and more beautiful cabinet woods which heretofore have come to us from other lands, could, if the Government should experiment, be found in many cases, if not in all, capable of development in some part of our territory.

The writer is a non-believer in an ideal home that shall be made of cement and stone only, and of which wood shall form no integral part. Possibly he is old-fashioned, possibly he is prejudiced, but wood with its beautiful graining, wood with its definite color scheme, has so much more intimate touch to personal contact, has so much more a satisfactory effect to the eye, that he for one protests that under the stress of "forest ravages and wood famines" it becomes possible for construction firms, cement manufacturers, stone quarries, etc., to emphasize the costs of their materials as being relatively no greater than wood and thus urging upon us as a possible future the age of home life with only the unsympathetic surface which these materials supply. The quality of finish in tones harmonious to the wood itself has many artistic possibilities, limited only by the feeling of the artist utilizing his material in the interests of the most sympathetic results. The carving of wood and the absolute charm that the clean-cut line of the sculptor-carver gives in this most congenial of all materials for carving is one that to lose from our homes, to say nothing of losing it from our public buildings, would be a national disaster, and yet unless some word of protest is raised to prevent destruction (and fortunately there are many words of protest now
being so raised), and unless, and this the writer wishes to emphasize, other words of suggestion as to how to secure the maximum material necessary for a great and growing nation’s needs are uttered, we will soon be face to face with an economic condition where cement will take the place of wood, and the cheerlessness of a refractory and unsympathetic material will be the substitute for the one which has been man’s companion from the first habitation raised by his hands.

The “roof tree” indicates in words the realization of the fact that from time immemorial man has looked to the forests for his home construction. Is it not then incumbent upon us of this generation to see that there shall be preserved for our children at least the possibility of selection in material, and the use by them, if they so will, of wood in its most beautiful form and of its greatest variety? A hundred years ago, approximately, a great philanthropist, here in this new country, a resident of Philadelphia, exclaimed: “If I knew that I were to die tomorrow, I would plant a tree today.” What better epitaph for Stephen Girard, what more noble thought than the one embodied in this short sentence!

We rail at the Government and its mistakes; at the State and its lack of recognition of the lines of development within its borders, at the City Administration and its inability to realize the necessities of the community, and yet in so doing we forget to ask the query, “What is the Government; what the State, what is the City Administration?” If so asked, the inevitable answer at once comes to our own minds, “We are the Government; we the State; we the City Administration.” And it is therefore our responsibility to see that such propositions as make for the betterment of the community, national, state or civic, shall be established, fundamentally, so as to be worked out, in a sense, automatically, through the machinery of administration, along such lines as, preventing mistakes, will secure both economic and artistic success, without which no great development will ever be secured in the future, that future for which all forces work either good or bad—the future of which the poet may still sing, the artist paint, and in which the “man” himself recreates.