

SAVE OUR FORESTS

By Robert W. Chambers

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A TREELESS NATION is a decadent nation.

When the forests of a country are neglected the mental and moral health of the inhabitants begins to decline.

Nations made treeless by the hand of man are dying nations. Nations which once were great and which no longer count are those the forests of which have been ruthlessly exterminated.

No matter what political cataclysm has overtaken and submerged peoples whose governments foster and care for forests, their potency remains, their vigor still endures, their racial resurrection is certain.

Take a map of the world and look upon the peoples who gradually are perishing. Those doomed lands are treeless. They are nations which, once mighty, have become negligible.

Neither in industry, nor in science, nor in art do they now contribute anything vitally constructive or creative. In the councils of world races—save for a feeble, peevish and purely selfish cry—they do not utter any sound. Theirs is the drowsy dream of glories past. Theirs is the sunset—golden still—that edges night, and the false, reflected light of night, and the unstirred silence of racial annihilation.

Once there were trees in Spain. Once China grew vast forests.

So scepters pass.

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Without trees there would be little, perhaps no human life on this planet. There would be little life at all, possibly none.

It is the leaf that enables us to eat and drink. Only through the laboratory of the living leaf is our nourishment prepared, directly or indirectly. The green leaf gives us oxygen for our lungs, and uses what carbon dioxide we expel. Our food is partly mineral. We should die for lack of it *unless predigested for us by vegetation.*

The living leaf prepares food for man and cooks it by sunshine.

Our food and raiment begin in the living leaf. The leaf enables us to

drink. There would be little sweet water in the world—little rain—except for the sheltering leaves of trees.

Minerals in solution — elements made available by water — are the food of trees. From the mesh of tiny feeding roots, up through the soft sap-wood, and out into the leaves is carried this mineral food which nourishes trees. Each leaf is a delicate little chemical laboratory through which the circulatory system of the tree passes. Each leaf transforms the inorganic into the organic, digesting, preparing food for itself and for man. And through each leaf the tree breathes. If in any of us God has planted the vaguest love of and desire for beauty, then we ought to grow forests sufficient to satisfy that craving. For, in all nature, nothing nobler and lovelier was ever made by God than the virgin tree in its intact chastity and beauty.

A tree is a living thing. It has no mind, yet, possibly it possesses something equivalent to intelligence. It has no nervous system, yet it is sensitive. It has no power of locomotion, yet it may advance or recoil.

All other attributes of life it possesses; it is born of the union of two sexes; it breathes, eats, drinks, digests, sleeps, grows. It is subject to illness and recovers with nursing. It survives wounds; its scars heal; anti-septic surgery can save it.

And, like all things living, it is mortal. What we call death is the physical finish of it, and of us.

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It is not difficult for us to understand why our pioneer forefathers hated the forests which covered our country and turned it to a perpetual twilight.

Except where lakes or water-courses broke the vast continuity of trees, all was sunless, shadowy silence.

No underbrush could grow in these dim forest aisles; the high, thick tapestry of foliage shut out all sunshine. Only on prairies, marshes, or along lakes and streams and seas, where the forests edged the sun, could any lesser vegetation take root and survive.

To live, our forefathers had to eat. To clear a little place in the sun for a patch of corn was a herculean task. A sort of frontier fury was born in the minds of those whose starved struggle to eat was met everywhere by the huge, gloomy, solid ramparts of living forests — a vast, gigantic barrier to sunlight without which no fruits of the earth are garnered.

Hatred for the forest was an evil heritage for us. Heed lest it be not our national undoing. Where forests die, waters die. Where waters die, the fruits of the earth perish.

And out of those mutilated and abominable wastes where axe or fire or both have passed, unguided by knowledge or common sense, are born tornadoes that devastate and kill; floods that destroy fertility, harrow the shrinking earth to its rocky ribs, and turn arable land to desert.

Springs, once protected by the spongy mesh of roots, and mosses, dry up; rivulets disappear, brooks dwindle, rivers shrink into warm and narrow channels bordered by burning boulders bare as bleached bones.

Rains bring rushes of flood water only — terrifying inundations that come in the twinkling of an eye, thunder by in devastating fury and are gone, leaving behind dead springs, dying streams, and the ghastly bones of withered rivers.

The forest hatred inherited from our pioneers has degenerated into the stupidity of apathy. And with it the land is degenerating, too.

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The people of the United States are not celebrated for their love of beauty. Any appeal to them on the ground that beauty is a necessity to the civilized would be listened to with the indifference born of ignorance. Forests are beautiful. Many agree; but will exterminate those same forests if a few dollars can be made out of the operation.

As Omar might have said: "What can their money buy that is more desirable than the forests they have sold to destruction?"

That isn't the point. The point is that the destroyers of forests have made a rotten bad bargain no matter