

# The Dire Need of Reforesting Bible Lands

Constructive Program Inaugurated to Relieve Distress of  
Famine-Stricken Areas.

By Jane Hill

A CONSTRUCTIVE program for reforesting Bible lands is being inaugurated by the Near East Relief, the organization chartered by United States Congress to relieve the distress of the people of the famine stricken and war-torn areas of the Levant.

Palestine today is for the most part a treeless country, nearly all its forests having been providently destroyed to provide building material and fuel. Yet it is a country which needs large forest reserves, and which cannot prosper without them.

Gone are the cedars of Lebanon, save for one small hollow on the north west slopes of the mountains. Gone are the oaks of Abraham, save in the table lands of Gilead—where Absalom was caught in the low-hanging branches of one of the large trees of Bashan. Most of the sycamores and the oleanders have also been sacrificed. Even the palm trees, once the glory of the land, are almost extinct.

The loss of the picturesque palm is perhaps regretted the most of all, because it is by far the most beautiful and most characteristic of all the trees of the Holy Land. In the old Roman days the palm was universal throughout the country. Nowhere else in the Roman Empire did the tree grow so beautifully and uniformly in its stateliness. The palm tree was imprinted on the old Roman coins as the national emblem.

## The Jericho Palm Grove

Jericho was once surrounded by a palm grove seven miles in width, and

in those days must have been a city well worth visiting. Today every vestige of the old forest has disappeared, and the plain around the city, once well watered and fertile, is now the desert site of a group of squalid hovels with a degenerate population of not more than 250 souls. To renew the agricultural prosperity of 2,000 years ago will be made possible when the war orphans under American care become skilled in the scientific methods of farming and forestation which is a part of the educational curriculum in Near East Relief orphanages.

The name "Jericho" means "place of the palm's fragrance". The palm grew naturally without cultivation, all along the valley of the Jordan. In Southern Syria, along the busy maritime coast from Beirut to Acre, great palmgroves greeted the eye of the Roman traveller. Tyre and Sidon were surrounded by palms. Phoenicia took its name from them,—the "Land of Palms."

## Treeless lands suffer

The passing of the palm trees from most parts of Palestine has certainly served to add to the prestige of the few specimens that remain. There are a half-dozen beautiful trees in Jerusalem, and a fine group surrounding the mosque at Nablus. The most striking spot on the whole coast of the Sea of Galilee is the little palm-tree oasis which greets the traveller at sunrise from the window of his hotel at Tiberias. In the valleys beyond Nazareth, an occasional stately palm is encountered, and in Damascus there are several fine

specimens. It is along the seashore between Acre and Beirut, in Syria, that they are most abundant, and here they are fighting a useful battle against the encroachment of the sands, which a few years ago threatened to engulf all the fertility of these maritime plains.

Agricultural conditions, of course, are entirely different here from those in European and American countries. Palestine cannot hope to produce great forests like those of Canada and the United States. But it is faced with a rigorous necessity of producing its own fuel and building material, and some of the foreign agricultural colonies in Palestine have already proved that this can be done without difficulty.

Most of the war orphans under American care in Bible lands expect to remain there as farmers and artisans. Therefore the importance of the reforestation of the country is emphasized in the industrial training classes. Economically speaking the Holy Land is dependent on sound agriculture, irrigation and forestation.

Realizing that the future of the Near East rests largely on the 100,000 kinless children, now provided for until they are old enough to look out for themselves, the Near East Relief is making every effort to give them the kind of training that will be most helpful in rehabilitating the country. To this end the school day is divided to allow the children to spend part of the time acquiring a rudimentary schooling and the other part in practical industrial accomplishment.

## REFORESTATION IN CHINA

During the year ending with the spring planting in 1920, China spent from \$20,000 to \$250,000 in forestry enterprises, mostly in nursery work and forest planting. The year showed a production of 100,000,000 trees in more than 1,000 nurseries and the planting of 25,000,000 to 30,000,000 trees on 100,000 acres of land. Prof. John H. Reisner, of the College of Agriculture and Forestry, remarks that while these figures seem small it should be remembered that interest in forestry in China is of recent development. It is stated that about 2,500,000 trees have been planted, about 1,000,000 of them in the spring of the present year. Three nurseries were

maintained, carrying 1,275,000 transplants and about 3,000,000 seedlings of 73 different species. Trees and seeds for nurseries and more than 50,000 trees for transplanting were distributed. There are also three substations located in different parts of the country, and two more are being planned. Forestry development is being carried forward under modern methods, largely under American trained foresters. The Government railways are engaged in the work with a view to supplying their own ties and timbers used in railroad construction and maintenance, and other railroads are expected to fall in line.—*The China Press*.