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What China Teaches Us About Forest Destruction

ONE of the most important of the many important subjects discussed in Editor Poe's Asiatic letters is one treated two weeks ago—the enormous losses which those Oriental countries suffer, and probably must suffer through all the centuries to come, through failure to give proper attention to forest preservation. Mr. Poe's article gives a vivid picture of the ruin of once-fertile lands through overflows, the silting up and periodical drying up of once constant streams, the enormous sums spent by poor peasants for coal taken scores and hundreds of miles on donkey-back or camel-back into districts where proper forest-management would have forever maintained sufficient quantities of fuel at low rates. Here indeed is the search-light of China's long history turned full upon one of the big problems of our new country, and with it we must see clearly the rain ahead unless we are wise enough to profit by the lesson for which China has paid so dearly.

In connection with the article referred to, Mr. Poe sent us from Peking, the picture shown herewith, (the original having been taken in China by Mr. Bailey Willis in 1904), and he also reminds us of Mr. Roosevelt's message to Congress two years ago in which he called attention to these photographs and also to a special report concerning the rain wrought in China through neglect

of the forests. In this message Mr. Roosevelt put so forcefully the argument for wiser legislation and management that we reprint some extracts from his message as follows:

"The lesson of deforestation in China is a lesson which mankind should have learned many times already from what has occurred in other places. Denudation leaves naked soil; then galling cuts down to the bare rock; and meanwhile the rock-waste buries the bottom lands. When the soil is gone, men must go, and the process does not take long.

"This ruthless destruction of the forests in northern China has brought about, or has aided in bringing about, desolation, just as the destruction of the forests in central Asia aided in bringing ruin to the once rich central Asiatic cities; just as the destruction of the forests in northern Africa helped towards the ruin of a region that was a fertile granary in Roman days.

Shortsighted man, whether barbaric, semi-civilized, or what he mistakenly regards as fully civilized, when he has destroyed the forests, has rendered certain the ultimate destruction of the land itself. In northern China the mountains are now absolutely barren peaks. Not only have the forests been destroyed, but because of their destruction the soil has been washed off the naked rock. The terrible consequence is that it is impossible now to undo the damage that has been done. Many centuries would have to pass before soil would again collect, or could be made to collect, in sufficient quantity once more to support the old time forest growth."

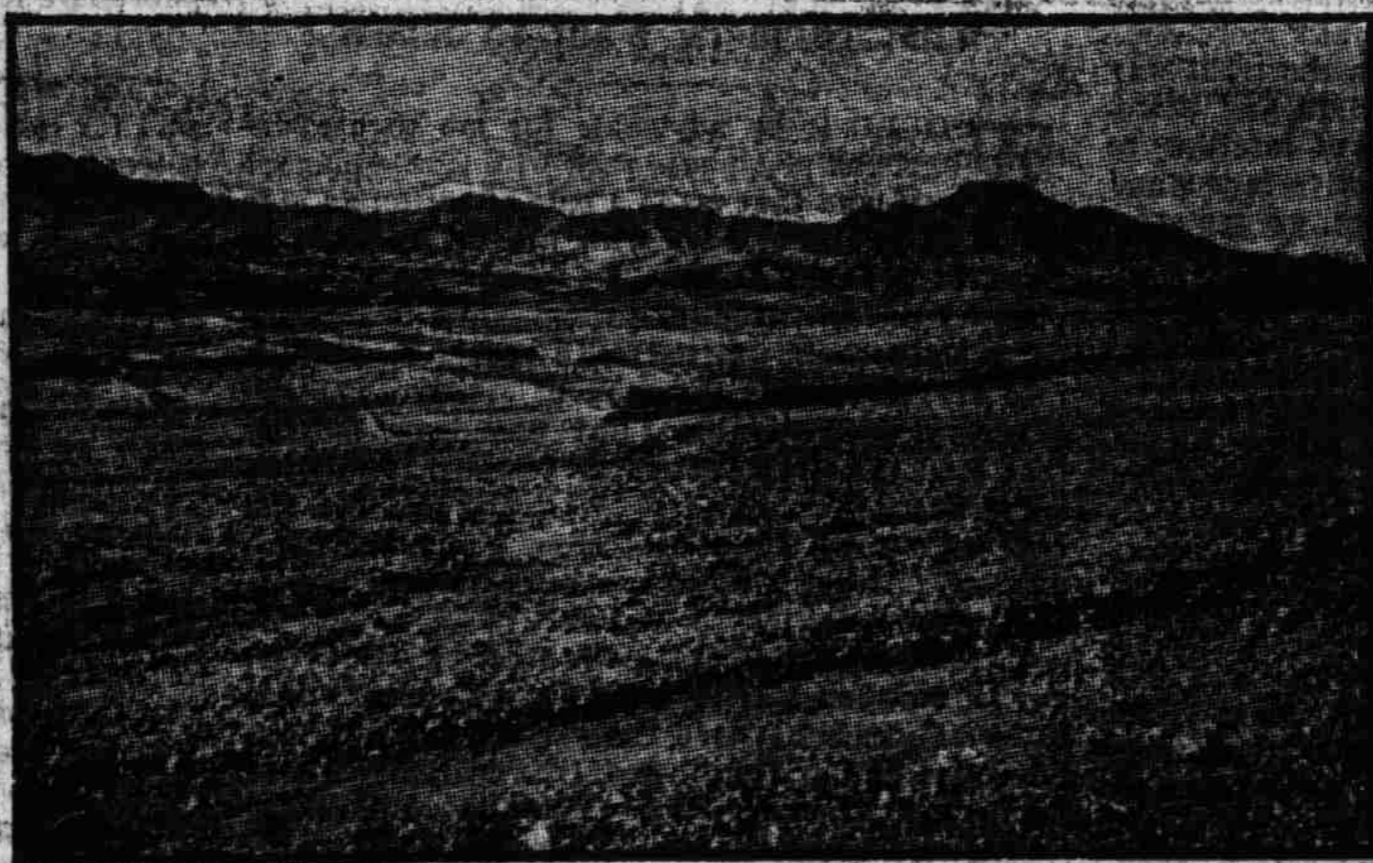
It is especially important that we of the South learn this great lesson of forest preservation, for the forests constitute a

great portion of our wealth and we have seemed to consider them inexhaustible, or as a concern of nature alone.

We must realize that the reckless, wasteful methods of the past will not longer do, that the forests are to be protected and conserved and perpetuated just as is the fertility of our soils.

We must learn, too, that forest preservation is not a local matter—the destruction of the Appalachian forests is a matter of direct concern to the dwellers in the Mississippi Valley or along the Atlantic Coast, and they cannot afford to

view such destruction with indifference. Indeed, it is high time for farmers everywhere to insist that both State and Nation take due steps to preserve the forests for present and future usefulness, and for the criminal forest waste of the past to give place to methods of practical conservation.



WHAT FOREST DESTRUCTION MEANS TO THE LOWLANDS

Shan-si Province, China. The whole valley is covered with water in the spring. The stone walls are built to catch the sediment.

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