

Report of Standing Committee on Ornamentals.

BY MRS. GEO S. GATES.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Those of us who have borne the heat and burden of the day, those of us who have been twenty years in Florida, and are thus entitled to the name of "Old Settler," are beginning to rejoice because of the real prosperity that is everywhere showing up over our fair State—at last the time has come when we also have green lawns, ornamental grounds and good roads.

These years of experience have taught us valuable lessons, these lessons are tabulated and crystalized into records and into great nurseries of thrifty stock, available for all kind of horticultural purposes. So now, the wayfaring man, though a "Yankee," need not err. We are greatly indebted to the State Horticultural Society for a large mass of these records, and we should all more earnestly work for a broader field of usefulness for this society.

For from the soil must ever come the sound, healthy prosperity of any State. As the spring is with us still, we must express the joy we have felt from her very first appearance, in the fragrant buds of the Yellow Jessamine, to the present pageant now waving about us in the waxy bloom of the great Magnolia. We have secured much pleasure by availing ourselves of the simple plants within easy reach. In December we secured many roots of the Yellow Jessamine—planted some about old stumps and some

on posts, and it is perfect for old fences and arbors. By March, we had some bloom, and the second year, with care and fertilizer a mass of new growth and blossoms—and I know no miser ever had more joy with his gold, than we, with our mass of golden fragrant bloom.

The wild plum is the next to bloom—about the middle of February. It does not bring a few blossoms, here and there, but great wreaths, bunches and banks of snowy bloom. One can go out and cut great armfuls of feathery blossoms, and fill the house with the very spirit of spring—and one is exalted with that spirit as they pass and repass; those great gnarled branches, that speak of greater life and peace and hope—crowd halls and dark corners with these fleeting joys. The gentle Japanese make the Cherry blossom time the happiest festival of the year. So do all lovers of nature—the pear tree is a marvel just after the plum, and so full of blossoms are all fruit trees, that I feel sure, Nature means that we are to enjoy her blooms, as well as her fruits—she is never stingy—if you ever dare think it of her, look at the spring-time blossoms; and learn there the wonderful lesson of the large, full glorious development that is certainly in common with all Nature. Let me plead for the arrangement of blossoms when we bring them indoors—for the busy housewife gets the most of her enjoyment from her cut flowers. Don't crowd several kinds in the

same holder. A perfect rose; a perfect branch of blossoms have as strong and refreshing an individuality as have our human friends, and they repay us as gracefully for respecting it, as they do. Next to bloom is the pink Azalea, or Wild Honeysuckle, as it is called all along the Atlantic States—simply delightful in a great mass—grown ten or twelve feet in low land, but with care, a thrifty bush on high land. The same can be said of the Dogwood Lily of the Valley tree, Spirea, or Bridal Wreath, the Oleander, Cape Jessamine, Crape Myrtle, and the Sweet Myrtle. These are all fragrant, hardy and close at hand. We find December planting most satisfactory for trees and shrubbery. We have had the best success in planting Oleanders, by getting a stake about two feet long, stiff enough to drive, sharpen it at one end and drive into the ground just where you want it to grow, leaving out two or three eyes or buds, they will put out from them and you have a tree at once.

I want to recall Mr. Taber's paper of last year, to your mind. It is well worth another reading. It was about the joys of a thicket, he called it, "A Message from the Woods." I saw the thicket before I read the message, and I felt then, that every Nature-lover had just some such spot—I have. It is a human instinct to keep a bit of nature's work close at hand, from whence can be drawn inspiration, strength and hope.

It may be a bit of pond, full of gleaming white lilies, or a bit of virgin forest in its strength and grandure, or a thicket full of the riotous profusion of trees, shrub and vine, that in its blending of shape and shade, is the despair of all our timid efforts. Let me suggest the greater planting of the Wistaria, both

white and purple, there again the Japanese have produced wonderful effects, their arbors are simply dreams. You do not realize you are looking at anything man has done, it looks like magic. Some of the flower stems are three feet long, and hang above the head like a purple and white sky. It will grow rampant here, even with little care—of course it is not as early as the plum, or as evergreen as the Yellow Jassamine, which I heartily recommend—the Wistaria blooms in early April and the Jessamine in early February, both are valuable for wiring to scrawny tall trees, and for covering unsightly objects. But chief among vines in this land of "Creepers," is the wild Smilax, or Bamboo Briar, as it is called here. I spoke of this vine last year, and wish to call your attention to it again. I have found four varieties, a plain green one, and a variegated one without thorns and mostly roots, they are worthless, never grow more than six or eight feet, then there is a strong rampant growing one with briars, and covered with blackberries in the fall, ornamental, but cruel. But the bamboo, or Wild Smilax, that is shipped from the entire South, for decorating along with Holly, Palm leaves, gray moss, long leaf pine, etc., is a most beautiful and satisfactory plant—grows just like cultivated Smilax, but is hardy, evergreen and a smooth vine, no berries, latter part of April has small, greenish blossoms, very fragrant, much like the Mignonette—if the roots are planted in December the vine will grow from thirty to sixty feet in a season. It comes up in the spring with a head like Asparagus and is edible, rather a good substitute for that vegetable, the vine runs along with this head and gets its growth before putting

out its side branches. You must be up and doing, for it is a rapid grower, it stays awake nights to grow. But a daintier, cleaner, more satisfactory vine, I have never found.

A beautiful, hardy, flowering border that is very effective along a fence, is the hardy Verbena, purple, it will grow almost two feet high. A neighbor has one on three sides of a town lot—it is a surprise and a delight to all who behold it, a mass of soft purple splendor; it reveals the value of flowers in a great mass.

There are wonderful possibilities for Florida, I can only hint at them, and give a bit of cheer and experience from my own little corner in Putnam county, and urge you to plant things that will also be a joy to others after we have passed away.

That brings me to the Village Improvement work. This work for a higher life for our village, for tree planting and the making of good roads, is one where men and women must work together. It is certainly the mother's anxious concern that her town, her county, her State be clean and up-to-date as well as her home, for in them she must continue the education of her boys and girls. It is the environment of the young that makes us have men and women with proper ideals of civic pride, and of patriotism. Mothers know instinctively how important it is to give children the right appreciation of beauty and cleanliness. When our boys and girls get the right education in Florida, our towns will be too nice for hogs and cattle to run in and not until then. But mothers sometimes fail. You can find this out by getting an ordinary man to clean up a bit of road-way. You will most likely find his idea of "cleaning

up" means to "dig up" everything living in sight, leaving a nice, clean bed of sand, without the slightest idea of the use for which the cleaning was made. We don't expect all men to see beauty, any more than we expect all women to sing, but we do ask, if you find a beautiful, young tree or Palmetto, that can remain in the clearing, just as well as not; please let it stay. In this village improvement work, we deal with matters of fact, not of opinion, so there is only the common inertia of humanity to overcome, and it is enough. Our study of how to get the most out of what we have, and for the comfort and happiness of all, has brought the Christ spirit much closer to us, in our homes and in our public work, for working with Nature, not against her, we are one with the birds and the trees, and we become as little children, simple and trustful. Surely Chas. Wagner would love Florida, for one soon learns here the "Simple Life," and cannot worry long if he tries.

As woman is the maker of the home "atmosphere," and man the strength, the foundation of the structure let us make the most of these great forces, that the environment may be the most perfect for the proper development of our children. Not stopping at the home but demanding and struggling for better conditions in our towns, our villages and our State.

Give me a man whose mother has taught him to love the birds, the trees, the beauties of nature, he is the man for road commissioner, for park work, he can see and save what nature has given us so lavishly on every side. But without the right environment and the earnest love implanted in the child-heart, our efforts will be slow and faltering.

Joy is in my heart when I read of

this good roads agitation, this work is the most important work before us today, the home, the mill, the mine are all handicapped terribly, without good roads. Life is without sociability and work a drudgery. There are many lovely spots in our State, beautiful villages, ideal in every way, but the tourist or settler are driven to other localities by the awful sand roads. This is a question for each town to settle for themselves for the needs and conditions are all so different.

We are greatly indebted to Senator Mann and Senator Morgan, for their heroic work along this line, and we feel sure they have the earnest support of every member of this Society. Let me suggest when you lay out your new roads, you call a conference of the City Fathers, and the Village Improvement Mothers. Women's studies along these lines are showing them the value of nature's free gifts in all States, by road-side and river, on mountain sides and in valleys. Immense amounts of beautiful and suitable material right at hand. They will be sure to get the trees planted at once and have all our magnificent forest trees represented. We like planting each species by itself, a long line of Water Oaks, a long line of Hollies, a long line of Camphor, Wild Olive, Live Oak, Palmetto, and a long line of the queen of all flowering trees, the Magnolia Grandiflora. This superb tree with its magnificent and odorous bloom should be planted

about every Florida home and village. All the trees I have mentioned are ever-green—what a wonderful collection, perfect for beautifying and shading our roadways. Miles of highways shaded with such a variety of splendid trees would give us, in time, such fame as have the giant Cryptomerians given Japan on her wonderful State roads. There the poor of the cities travel for miles on perfect roads and under giant trees, taking in their rude vehicles the babies and kitchen outfit and journeying along for days out of doors and under God's great canopy—they get courage and health to return again to the city struggle. How good it would be if our poor could journey to the ocean or gulf—only a few paltry miles, and it would often bring back health to the fever stricken and hopeless. In the face of the wonderful progress of Florida in twenty years, we feel certain that our good roads dreams will come true. The Times-Union says they will, and the Times-Union ought to know, they say we shall have an automobile track from North to South, and from East to West of the State, and in the near future. If there is anything in Christian Science let us all join heartily in believing in this dream, and if we are good Americans "hustle for it" as well, for nothing can be more ornamental, more useful, more progressive than hard, well-shaded highways.