NATURE RAMBLINGS

By Frank Thone

White Pine

Among the noblest of our winter evergreens is the white pine, distinguishable from all other common pines by the dark, smooth bark on its upper trunk and branches, even where these are of considerable size, and especially by the fact that its long, fine, soft needles are invariably found in bunches of five. The trees of the yellow-pine group have coarser, stiffer needles in groups of from two to four, usually two, but with one unimportant exception on the Pacific coast, the yellow-pine needles are never in fives.

A past generation built very largely in white pine—"soft pine" they called it then. Now it is scarce and very expensive, and most of it comes from the Pacific Northwest, where there are still some great white pine forests, though these are being devoured by ax and saw as were those of Minnesota and Michigan and Maine in the good old days when people thought that American forests could never be exhausted.

In the East, a new generation, warned of the prospective desperate shortage of this most desirable softwood, has been setting out plantations of white pine, and caring solicitously for the patches of original timber that are left. But by a tragic irony, just as the loss by waste was being ended, greater loss by plague has come in. For the white pine of the central and eastern states is threatened with extinction by a terrible plant disease, the white pine blister rust. It has been discovered that this disease depends on currants and gooseberries for a part of its life, and both wild and cultivated bushes of these berries are being wiped out in the campaign to save the white pine trees.

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