Seed Gift

By JAMES W. NOLAN

From the St. Francisville area, well scouted long since by plantsmen, arrived a packet of seed from an old camellia the donor was unable to identify—some lost-label plant perhaps transported to America on a sailing ship a century ago, or possibly a seedling that sprouted there in some far-off time. At any rate, the accompanying note related, this particular tree outtops the house it grows near.

Already some of these gift seeds have become plantlets, but no one will be able to calculate their ancestry even given the years from root to stem, from stem to lower. Like the rose, no man knows through what wild centuries roves back the camellia, nor predict what protean shapes and colors it will take on.

A single flower and leaf will help more to establish identity than all the seed a big camellia tree bears. For the seedlings go on to new marriages of form and hue, some possibly lovelier than the parent plant’s. Meanwhile, can it be that so old and so large a flowering tree has eluded the categorizing collector?