

Springtime

Back and forth across the land, in swift and sudden alternation, the March winds toss days of bitter cold and days of genial warmth, now out of the eternal winter of the north, now from the endless summer of the tropics. In addition, they blow a faint breath of stolen fragrance from far-off meadows, and tempt forth the bees, but they find no flowers yet.

One day, when the wind breathes a continuous breath of warmth from the south, I perch for a moment on a split rail fence. More and more the tawny earth comes in sight among the puddles of melted snow, and the grateful odor of the warming earth comes to my nostrils, while the woods are filled with a certain subtle scent quite distinct from the very apparent resinous and balsamic aroma of the evergreens and eludes description but as a kind of freshness that tickles the nose with longing for a more generous waft of it.

To my ears, from every side, the sounds of spring, yet I listen for fuller confirmation of its presence. Then it comes! The clarion call of geese faring so easily along. How pleasant are the voices of these returning exiles, not as game, but friendly messengers, bringing tidings of spring.

Then April arrives and, at last, there is full and complete assurance of spring. The songs of the brooks has abated something of its first triumphant swell, and is often overborne now by the jubilant chorus of the birds: the robin's joyous song, the sweetness of the meadowlark whistle, the bluebird's carol, the cheery call of the cardinal, and the trill of the song sparrow.

Down in the open marshes, the muskrats voyage again with heads above water, and go mate seeking and food gathering in sunshine and starlight, undimmed by a roof of ice. The painted wood drake swims above the submerged tree roots, while all around us, from the drift of floating and stranded waterweeds, arises the dry, crackling croak of frogs.

In May, the gray haze of undergrowth and lofty canopy is turning to a misty green, while meadow marigolds lengthen their golden chain, link by link, over the countryside. The maples are yellow with paler bloom, the graceful birches are bent with their light burden of tassels, and the dogwoods are christening the sky with white upon white.

Blossom and greenness are everywhere; even the brown path of the plow and harrow are greening with springing grain.

In the springtime, there comes to us a restless longing. Call it whatever name you want. To me it is "spring fever." This state of mind exists and needs a cure.

There is no better remedy for it than to yield to the feeling, just as the birds and the beasts do, to burst our bonds for a little while and to spend a day or a week, if we can, far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife. It matters little what the excuse may be that we make to ourselves and our business associates, whether it is to go fishing, or hunting, or to

collect wildflowers. Any excuse is a good one, which for a time frees man or woman from the restraints of everyday life and gives opportunity for communion with nature, now just stretching her arms after her long sleep.

There is brightness with beauty everywhere to please the eye, and the ear is delighted with the hum of bees and the melodies of long-absent songbirds. Sheep frisk in the meadows, the horses race about madly, and the cattle essay a few heavy capers; yet all are merely giving expression to a gladness, which comes from the stimulus of springtime.

All nature is warmth and color and melody!

Man feels it to a more exalted degree than any other animal. The enchanting spell of the season infuses new buoyancy into his being. He is most susceptible to the impress of nature in her kindest mood and her most beautiful adornment. Though he enjoys the charm of the present in itself, he enjoys it the more in contrast with the cold, bleak, and dormant season, which preceded it.

The fever of the season infects me, and I dream of the beckoning woods and fields where America's game bird, decorated with a shimmering rainbow of colors, struts his stuff and gobbles his tune. But the waters have other treasures, so I chase the shy and fastidious bass with my rod and reel. A demon of a beautiful fish ó aggressive, swift of action, and a fighter by nature.

Wide-awake, they cast a spell over me, which reaches from the woods and lakes to the very center of the city. I prowls about from store to store, inspecting every new caller and every shade of camouflage and all the new colors and forms and materials of flies and lures. I hold long and grave conversations on such and purchase some of each even though I have plenty from previous years.

I call my friends, pressed by business demands, and discuss a word or two, and in a few minutes they have the fever too. They loosen their shackles and the fever spreads.

My wife calls her doctor to see if there is a cure. He informs her, "No doctor can cure it, or would want to if he could, because it is a healthy malady. The fever takes the sportsman out among nature's best of the wholesome and the beautiful, where there is quiet and peace and health. The impulses of the springtime, to fly to the woods and fields and brooks, are those which bring him needed rest, a recuperated being, and longer life. Nothing could be better for your husband because his mind will be diverted from the affairs of business."

I like his bedside manners and inform him that I will use his services again because he has a cure for all of my seasonal ills. For payment, he asks only to go along ó and immediately granted.

The sunshine, the bracing air, and the swaying boughs invite us forth. A feeling of quietude and self-content steal over us, and we take a quiet, restful delight in all we see.

We watch the bath of the birds, the perch on a nearby limb, the pluming and oiling of the feathers, and hear the song of the singer's own composition. We watch the sun eclipse the hilltops ó long, level beams of light hunt out the dew-diamonds and lend an opalescent gleam to the glittering array in nature's jewel box ó while the fresh smell drifts out of the air. Not long thereafter, the landscape takes on an even tone as the shadows lose themselves and leave us listless, as the day has come in earnest.

And on return to the humdrum of daily life from this voyage, we are pleased with ourselves and as a consequence friends with all the world.

Spring, for many reasons, smoothes the folds of memory, making us forgetful of wintry skies, dead leaves, yellow grass, cold feet, and aching limbs, and permits us only to recall bright skies, pretty foliage and grass, birds, songs, and happiness.

Today, amid the surroundings of a budding Southern spring, and in sight of the very flowers and trees, which helped so materially to nourish my boyhood, youth, and early manhood, my mind turns back to those days of spring so carelessly spent.

õAh, happy hills; ah, pleasing shade;

Ah, fields beloved in vain,

Where once my careless childhood stray'd.õ

(anon)

I remember the mild soft winds, which softened the ice and set the meadow brooks to overflowing and caused my spirits to thaw and overflow. It was to me that the first bluebird called out her sweet and cheery welcome, and it was my sharp ears which discovered the pioneer robin in the top of a tall maple. In my fist, I brought home the earliest spring flowers to my Mom who so adored them, and so adored me.

The pussy willow bloomed for me before others saw it, and all the creeping, crawling, and flying things reported their advent to me before the rest of the world was aware of their arrival.

All these glimpses into the book of spring were granted to me, and by slow accretions I gathered a rich store of knowledge concerning the wonderful out-of-door life.

õKnowledge, never learned in schools,

Of the wild bee's morning chase,

Of the wild flower's time and place,

Flight of birds and habitude,

Of the tenants of the wood;
How the tortoise bears his shell,
How the woodchuck digs his cell,
And the ground mole sinks his well;
How the robin feeds her young,
How the oriole's nest is hung,
Where the whitest lilies blow,
Where the freshest berries grow,
Where the ground nut trails its vine,
Where the wood grape's clusters shine;
Of the black wasp's cunning way,
Mason of his walls of clay,
And the architectural plans
Of gray hornet artisan!-
For eschewing books and tasks,
Nature answers all he asks!
Hand in hand with her he walks,
Face to face with her he talks,
Part and parcel of her joy.ö

(anon)

And this knowledge is not lost or forgotten but becomes more distinct and permanent with the lapse of years. It shapes itself into pictures of old familiar scenes, which are greater than any artist's brush ever wrought. There is music in them too. You can hear the singing of the wild birds and the sighing of the wind among the trees, and the ripple, swish, ripple, swish of the water as plainly as you can see the cloud shadows passing over it and all the tints of tender springtime green.

I have seen and loved these scenes of springtime, and they have become a part of me. I may not, for a time, appreciate them or realize their import; but eventually they take on their full value, the more surely if they are no longer at hand.

With rod or gun, I go back to them, not alone to hunt and fish, but also to satisfy a craving for the open air and sounds which I get pleasure from ó a small bird in the fullness of its life trilling a sonnet to his lady love in his dream, the well assorted chorus of the frogs, the carol of the birds, and the gentle lapping of the water on the rock. Blended in memory, they have often been enjoyed.

Spring on a sunny day! Is there any place on earth that is not delightful? It is one of the glorious pleasures given to every man by nature ó her reward for his love.

õGod is its author, and not man; He laid

The keynote of all harmonies; He planned

All perfect combinations, and He made

Us so that we could hear and understand.ö