

Some Spring Days in Iowa eBook

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FOREWORD

It is indeed a pleasure thus to open the gate while my friend leads us away from the din and rush of the city into "God's great out-of-doors." Having walked with him on "Some Winter Days," one is all the more eager to follow him in the gentler months of Spring—that mother-season, with its brooding pathos, and its seeds stirring in their sleep as if they dreamed of flowers.

Our guide is at once an expert and a friend, a man of science and a poet. If he should sleep a year, like dear old Rip, he would know, by the calendar of the flowers, what day of the month he awoke. He knows the story of trees, the arts of insects, the habits of birds and their parts of speech. His wealth of detail is amazing, but never wearying, and he is happily allusive to the nature-lore of the poets, and to the legends and myths of the woodland. He has the insight of Thoreau, the patience of Burroughs, and a nameless quality of his own—a blend of joyous love and wonder. His style is as lucid as sunlight, investing his pages with something of the simplicity and calm of Nature herself. The fine sanity and health of the man are in the book, as of one to whom the beauty of the world is reason enough for life, and an invitation to live well. He does not preach—though he sometimes stops to point to a forest vista, or a sunset, where the colors are melted into a beauty too fair and frail for this earth.

Let us hope that the author will complete his history of the seasons, and tell of us of Summer with its riot of life and loveliness, and of the Autumn-time with its pensive, dreamy beauty that is akin to death. He is a teacher of truth and good-will, of health and wisdom, of the brotherhood of all breathing things. Having opened the gate, I leave it open for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear.

JOSEPH NEWTON

CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA DECEMBER 1, 1908

APRIL—BUDS AND BIRD SONGS

IV. APRIL—BUDS AND BIRD SONGS

*"Has she not shown us all?
From the clear space of ether, to the small
Breath of new buds unfolding? From the meaning
Of Jove's large eyebrow, to the tender greening
Of April meadows?"*

"And whiles Zeus gives the sunshine, whiles the rain."



A strong southeast wind is blowing straight up the broad river, driving big undulations up the stream, counter to the current which, in turn, pushes at the base of the waves and causes their wind-driven crests to fall forward and break into spray. The whole surface of the river is flecked with these whitecaps, a rare sight on an inland stream but characteristic of April. We sit on a ledge of rock high up the slope of the canon and listen as they break, break, break. We may close our eyes and fancy we are

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with Edmund Danton in his sea-girt dungeon, or with Tennyson and his “cold, gray stones,” or with King Canute and his flattering courtiers on the sandy shore. But a song sparrow with his recitative “Oleet, oleet, oleet,” followed by the well-known cadenza, dispels the fancies and calls our attention to himself as he sits on a hop hornbeam and sings at half-minute intervals. The wind ruffles his sober coat of brown and gray and he looks like a careless artist, thrilling with the soul of song.

Notwithstanding the high wind there is a heavy haze through which the sun casts but faint shadows. Across the white-flecked river the emerald meadow rises in a mile long slope until it meets the sky in a mist of silver blue. To the right a big tract of woodland is haloed by a denser cloud of vivid violet as if the pillar of cloud which led the Israelites by day had rested there; or as if mingled smoke and incense were rising from Druid altars around the sacred grove. As a matter of fact, it is a mingling of the ever increasing humidity, the dust particles in the air and the smoke from many April grass fires. To the left of the meadow there is a sweep of arable land where disc harrows, seeders, and ploughs are at work. The unsightly corn stalks of the winter have been laid low, the brown fields are as neat and tidy as if they had been newly swept; and this is Iowa in April.

Up and down the river the willow leaves are just unfolding, bordering the stream with tender green. The tassels of the pussy willows, which were white in March, are now rosy and gold, due to the development of the anthers. The aspens at the front of the wood are thickly hung with the long yellowish-white tassels and look like masses of floss silk among the tops of the darker trees. A big cottonwood is at its most picturesque period in the whole year. The dark red anthers make the myriads of catkins look like elongated strawberries. Tomorrow, or the next day, these red anthers will break and discharge their yellow pollen and then the tassels will be golden instead of strawberry-colored. Spring seems to unfold her beauties slowly but she has something new each day for the faithful.

The ash, the hackberry, the oaks, the linden, the locusts on the hill and the solitary old honey-locust down by the river’s brink are as yet unresponsive to the smiles of spring. The plum, the crab apple, the hawthorn and the wild cherry are but just beginning to push green points between their bud scales. But the elms are a glory of dull gold; every twig is fringed with blossoms. The maples have lost their fleecy white softness, for the staminate flowers which were so beautiful in March have withered now. But the fruit blossoms remind us of Lowell’s line, “The maple puts her corals on in May.” In Iowa he might have made it April instead of May. But that would have spoiled his verse.

* * * * *



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For long we sit and drink in the beauty of the scene. Meanwhile the birds on this wooded slope are asking us to use our ears as well as our eyes. Such a mingling of bird voices! The “spring o’ th’ year” of the meadow larks and the mingled squeaks and music of the robins are brought up by the wind from the river bottom, and the shrill clear “phe-be” of the chickadee is one of the prettiest sounds now, just as it was in February. Pretty soon a bevy of them come flitting and talking along, like a girl botany class on the search. Before they have passed out of sight the loud and prolonged “O-wick-o-wick-o-wick-o-wick” of the flicker makes us lift our eyes to the top of a scarlet oak and anon three or four of the handsome fellows alight nearer by so that we may the better admire their white-tailed coats, brown shoulders, scarlet napes and the beautiful black crescent on their breasts. When we hear the call of the flicker we may know that spring is here to stay. They are as infallible as the yellow-breasted larks in the meadows.

“Chip-chip-chip-chip,”—yes, of course that’s the chipping sparrow; another of the engaging creatures which almost has been driven from the habitations of his human friends by the miserable English sparrows. Often have we seen the little fellow set upon and brutally hurt by these pirates. Now he stays around rural homes, and his chestnut crown, brown coat mixed with black and gray, his whitish vest and black bill are always a welcome sight. He takes up the chant of the year where the departing junco left it off, throws back his tiny head and his little throat flutters with the oft-repeated syllable, continued rapidly for about four seconds. A while longer we wait and are rewarded by a few bars of the musicful song of the brown thrasher who has just arrived with Mrs. Thrasher for two weeks of courtship and song, after which they will build a new home in the hazel thicket and go to housekeeping.

Just as we are rising to leave there is the glimmer of the blue-bird’s wing and the brilliant fellow and his pretty mate appear at the top of the bank, where the staghorn sumac still bears its berries. None of the birds of the winter seems to care much for these berries but the bluebirds evidently love them. As another instance of their tastes in this direction may be mentioned the fact that for the past three weeks a pair of blue birds have made many visits every day to a Chinese matrimony vine, by the dining room window of the writer’s home. This vine, as everyone knows, has a wreath of juicy red berries in the fall, which hang through the winter and are dried, but still red, in the spring. It was the first week of March when the family first heard the pleasing notes of the blue bird outside the window at breakfast time, and saw the brilliant male sitting on a post on the back lawn and his less brilliant, but equally attractive mate sitting on the clothesline. A little later and he flew to the



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vine, picked off one berry and ate it, took another one in his mouth and then returned to his post, while she followed his example. Both chirped and pronounced the berries good, though up to that time the members of the household had supposed they were poisonous. After a few more bites of the morning meal the birds went all around the house, inspecting every nook and crevice. But they found every place fully occupied by the pestiferous English sparrows, who darted at them maliciously. For two whole days the blue birds stayed around the lawn and garden, but the sparrows made their lives miserable and finally they went to the timber an eighth of a mile away and selected an abiding place in the cavity of a basswood. But every morning and evening, sometimes many times during the day, they came for their meal of berries from the vine. Usually they were on hand as soon as the sun was up, and a more devoted and well behaved couple was never seen either in the bird or the human world.

* * * * *

We rise at length and walk along the wooded slope admiring new beauties at every step. Here is a thicket of wild gooseberry filled with dark green leaves and the tinkling notes of tree sparrows, and we hardly know which is the more beautiful. A little farther and we are in a tangle of pink and magenta raspberry vines from which the green leaves are just pushing out. The elder has made a great start; the yellowish-green shoots from the stems and from the roots are already more than six inches long. The panicked dogwood and the red-osier dogwood (no, not the flowering dogwood) as yet show no signs of foliage, but the fine white lines in the bark of the bladdernut, which have been so attractive all winter, are now enhanced by the soft myrtle green of the tender young leaves. The shrubby red cedar is twice as fresh and green as it was a month ago, as it hangs down the face of the splintered rock where the farmer boys have set a trap to catch the mother mink. But Mrs. Mink is wary. Here is a pile of feathers, evidently from a wild duck, which seems to indicate that while the duck was making a meal of a fish which she had brought to shore, the mink pounced upon her and ate both duck and fish.

While we stand looking there is a slight movement among the roots of a silver maple at the river's brink. A moment later Mrs. Mink comes around the tree and towards us. She is about eighteen inches long, with a bushy tail about another eight inches, her blackish-brown body about as big round as a big man's wrist, and she has a "business-looking" face and jaw. Did you ever try to take the young minks from their nest in the latter part of April and did Mrs. Mink fight? She hasn't seen or smelled us yet, but suddenly when she is within seven feet of us, there is an upward movement of that supple, snakelike neck, a quick glance of those black diamond eyes, and she turns at right angles and dives into the river. A frog could not enter the water so silently.



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We climb the slope again and pause in front of a big sugar maple, a rather rare sight hereabouts. The sap-sucker has bored a row of fresh holes in the bark of the tree and the syrup has flowed out so freely that the whole south side of the tree is wet with it. Scores of wasps, bees and flies of all sizes and colors are revelling in the sweetness.

Finally we come to where there is less grass but more dead leaves and leaf mould, and here is the first real herbaceous flower of this spring, the dwarf white trillium, or wake-robin. How beautiful it looks, its three pure, waxy-white petals, its six golden anthers and three long styles, and its pretty whorl of three ovate leaves, at the summit of a stem about four inches high. A little farther and we find a group of them and then other clusters, fresh and pure and sweet enough to make a bouquet for Euphrosyne.

Oh, but someone says, the hepatica is the first flower of spring; all the nature writers say so. Well, but they don't seem to say much about the trillium; possibly they haven't found it so often. Indeed, it seems to be more choice of its location. It is hardly ever, perhaps it would be safe to say never, found on a southern or a southwestern slope. Almost invariably it is found on the steep slope of a river bank, facing northeast or east. Hepaticas nearly always grow on the same slope, but they come into blossom about two days later than the trillium. But on another bank which faces the noon and the afternoon sun the hepaticas are up with the trilliums in the calendar of spring. This year the trillium was found blooming, on a northeastern slope, March 24. At this place the hepatica did not bloom until March 26. But it bloomed March 24, on a southwest slope, fifteen miles away.

By-the-way, the list of March blooming plants for 1908, is probably one of the longest for years: March 20, aspen; twenty-first, hazel and silver maple; twenty-third, pussy willow, prairie willow and white elm; twenty-fourth, dwarf white trillium and hepatica (also known as liverleaf, squirrelcup, and blue anemone); twenty-fifth, slippery elm, cottonwood; twenty-ninth, box elder and fragrant sumac; thirtieth, dandelion; thirty-first, Dutchman's breeches.

How some of these early flowers secure the perpetuation of their species is an interesting study for amateur botanists. In the case of the trillium the fruit is a three-lobed reddish berry, but one has to search for it as diligently as Diogenes did for an honest man before he finds it. The plant seldom sets seed in this vicinity, but seems to depend rather upon its tuber-like rootstocks in which the leaves lie curled all through the winter. The hepatica attracts pollen-feeding flies, female hive-bees and the earliest butterflies, and is thus cross-fertilized to some extent; but it is thought also to be able to effect self-fertilization. In the case of the *hepatica acutiloba*, however, it has been found that staminate flowers grow on one plant and pistillate flowers on another, hence insects are essential to the perpetuation of this species.



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After bringing us the trilliums and hepaticas in numbers, Nature pauses. She means to give us time to inhale the fragrance of some of the hepaticas, and to learn that other hepaticas of the same species have no fragrance at all; that there is a variety of delicate colors, white, pink, purple, lavender, and blue; that the colored parts, which look like petals are really sepals; that they usually number six, but may be as many as twelve; that there are three small sessile leaves forming an involucre directly under the flower; that if we search we shall find some with four, more rare than four-leaved clovers; that the plant which was fragrant last year will also be fragrant this year; that the furry stems are slightly pungent,—enough to give spice to a sandwich; these preliminary observations fit us for more intricate problems later on.

* * * * *

Spenser, the divinely tongued, pictures April as a lusty youth, riding upon the bull with the golden horns (*Taurus*), wading through a flood, and adorned with garlands of the fairest flowers and buds. A better figure would have been Europa riding Zeus. And Chaucer also makes April a masculine month:

*"When that Aprille with his showeres swoote
The drought of Marche had perced to the roote."*

But surely April, with her smiles and [TN-1] tears, ought to be regarded as a feminine month. Ovid has shown that she was not named from *aperire*, to open, as some have supposed, but from Aphrodite, the Greek name for Venus, goddess of beauty and mother of love. She is chaste, even cold, but grows sweeter and more affectionate every day and her tears all end in smiles. Her flowers are pure and mostly white, fitting for a maiden. Look at the list (if the weather is warm):

White or whitish:—Rue-anemone, hepatica, spring beauty, blood-root, toothwort, Dutchman's breeches, dog's tooth violet, wild ginger, chickweed, Isopyrum, plantain-leaved everlasting, shepherd's purse, shad-bush, wild strawberry, whitlow-grass, wind-flower, hackberry (greenish white), false Solomon's seal, catnip, spring cress, wild black currant, wild plum.

Yellow or yellowish:—Marsh marigold, creeping buttercup, marsh buttercup, small-flowered crowfoot, dandelion, yellow woodsorrel, bell-wort, star-grass, downy yellow violet, pappoose root, lousewort, prickly ash, hop hornbeam, white oak, mossy-cup oak, butternut, sugar maple.

Purple or blue:—Common blue violet, trillium (*recurvatum* and *erectum*) hepatica, Virginian cowslip (*lung-wort* or *bluebells*), woodsorrel, common blue phlox, ground plum.

Green:—The Indian turnip, and several of the sedges.



Pink:—Spring beauty, toothwort, dog's tooth violet, hepatica.

Scarlet:—Columbine.

From this list it ought to be plain that April is a dainty queen, wearing a dress of cheerful green, a bodice of white, with violets in her hands, pink in her cheeks, and a single scarlet columbine in her wealth of golden hair, which indeed comes nearly being the portrait of Dione herself. Or, as one of the poets has better described her:



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*April stood with tearful face
With violets in her hands, and in her hair
Pale wild anemones; the fragrant lace
Half-parted from her breast, which seemed like fair,
Dawn-tinted mountain snow, smooth-drifted there.*

In this long list of April flowers—some observers will be able to make it still longer—there are many favorites. The pretty rue-anemone recalls the tradition that Anemos, the wind, chose the delicate little flowers of this family as the heralds of his coming in early spring. And in the legend of Venus and Adonis the anemone is the flower that sprang from the tears of the queen as she mourned the death of her loved one. Theocritus put the wind-flowers into his Idylls, and Pliny said that only the wind could open them. The Spring beauty has as rich a legend, for it was the Indian Miskodeed, left behind when Peboan, the winter, the Mighty One, was melted by the breath of spring. The toothwort (*dentaria laciniata*) is sometimes known as the pepper-root, and every school boy and girl living near the woods is familiar with the taste of its tubers and the appearance of its cross-shaped flowers. The plummy dicentra, or Dutchman's breeches, seems so feminine as to be grossly misnamed until we remember that it was first discovered in the Rip Van Winkle country. The wild ginger with its two large leaves and its queer little blossoms close to the ground is another delight to the saunterer along the rocky slopes, where the feathery shad-bush—the aronia of Whittier—with its wealth of snowy blossoms and the wild plum not far away, with its masses of pure white, are inspirations to clean and sweet lives, calling to mind the lines of Wordsworth:

*One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good
Than all the sages can.*

In rocky fields and hillsides and dry open woods, the dwarf everlasting (*Antennaria plantaginifolia*) with its silvery-white little florets set in delicate cups, is one of the first species of the great composite family to bloom. We take it from between the rocks and think of those lines of Tennyson, which John Fiske declared to be among the deepest thoughts ever uttered by poet:

*Flower in the crannied wall
I pluck you out of the crannies,
I hold you here, root and all in my hand
Little flower,—but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is.*

Even more innocent, fresh and fair, is the bloodroot, with its snowy petals, golden center and ensanguined root-stock which crimson the fingers that touch it. This is the herb,



so the legend says, which the Israelites in Egypt dipped in sacrificial blood to mark their doorposts. As long ago as last November we dug up one of the papery sheaths and found the flower, then about a half inch long, snugly wrapped in its single leaf; and now the pale green leaf has pushed up and unfolded, showing the fragile flower in all its beauty.



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Strange contrasts we see in some of these April flowers. Some of them open their star-like eyes for a day or two and dot the floor of the woods with beauty and then their little contribution to the spring is done and they are seen no more until another year. They bring us beauty and sweetness and then they pass from us, like the sweet and childish but perfect lives we all have known and loved. In contrast to such as these there is the Jack-in-the-pulpit of the April woods which has no floral envelope of beauty, no fragrance, no inspiration, so busy is it storing up its swollen fortunes down in the bank, leaving behind it a tuber so rank and tainted that even the Indians couldn't eat it until they had first roasted it, then ground it into powder, and finally made it into a kind of bread. But sordid-lived accumulators, herbaceous and human, have been with us since the world began. Laban was a monopolist of pretty daughters and fine live stock,[TN-2] and Theocritus, in his day, was moved to say that "Money is monarch and Master," and to exclaim:

*Fools, what gain is a world of wealth in your houses lying?
Wise men deem that in that dwells not true pleasure of riches,
But to delight one's soul...
Only the muses grant unto mortals a guerdon of glory;
Dead men's wealth shall be spent by the quick that are heirs to
their riches.*

Toward the end of the month, when the gelatinous masses in the water courses have developed the little black dots sufficiently so that we can see they are tadpoles, when the songsters have been joined by the catbird, the rose-breasted grosbeak, the woodthrush, the whippoorwill, the cheerful and friendly chewink and several of the warblers and flycatchers, the rivers and creeks will be fringed with the brilliant yellow of the marsh marigold, and we shall think of Shakespeare, walking the meadows of Avon, getting material for that song of the musicians in Cymbeline:

*And winking Mary-buds begin
To ope their golden eyes.*

And meanwhile the violet, which was among the plants sacred to Aphrodite, was also appealing to this master poet, who was born this month, as were Wordsworth, George Herbert, John Keble, Anthony Trollope, David Hume, and Edward Gibbon, and who died this month as did Edward Young, who wrote *Night Thoughts*, and Abraham Lincoln, who freed a race and saved a nation. Who can ever forget the month of Lincoln's death after he has once read that exquisite description of an April day and the song of the hermit thrush, written by Whitman to commemorate the funeral of his friend?

The violets have been especially loved by the poets. Theocritus placed them foremost in his coronals and put them into Thyrsis's song of Daphnis's fatal constancy. Chaucer



had them in his garlands, and Spenser's "flock of nymphes" gather them "pallid blew" in a meadow by the river side. In Percy's *Reliques* they are the "violets that first appear, by purple mantles known." Milton allows Zephyr to find Aurora lying "on beds of violet blue." Shakespeare places them upon Ophelia's grave and says they are "sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes." Wordsworth, Tennyson, and all our own poets have loved them.



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But we have lingered too long among our flowers and thoughts in the April woods. The filmy haze which veiled the sun has thickened into threatening clouds, and as we look across the meadow to where the silver blue haze rested on the delectable mountain in the morning we see instead the rain-fringe, veiling and obscuring the landscape. The wind has died to a dead calm and the river is still. As the shower comes nearer the whole landscape is shrouded in an ever darkening gray and presently big round drops splash upon the surface of the river. In a moment we are surrounded by the rain. How beautiful is the first spring rain! It does not run down the slope as in the winter when the ground was frozen, but the thirsty earth seems eager to drink every drop. The unfolding leaves of the shrubs are bathed in it and the tender firstlings of the flowers are revelling in it. It dims the singing of the birds, but the robins and the meadow larks carol on and the spring music of the frogs in the nearby pond has not yet ceased.

What makes the raindrops round? And why are the drops at the beginning of the shower much larger than those which follow? We do not know. Perhaps it is well. Walt Whitman says that “you must not know too much or be too scientific about these things.” He holds that a little indefiniteness adds to the enjoyment, a hazy borderland of thought as it were, like that which rests in April mornings on enchanted highlands away across the river, which we have never yet—as Thoreau says—“tarnished with our feet.”

And, anyway, before we can reason it out, the rain has ceased and the last rays of the descending sun come through an opening in the clouds in that beautiful phenomenon known as a “sunburst.” [TN-3] The white beams come diagonally through the moisture-laden air, as if in a good-night smile to the tender flowers and buds.

Warming with the sunshine and watering with the showers—that is Miss April making her flower garden grow.

MAY—PERFECTION OF BEAUTY

V. MAY—PERFECTION OF BEAUTY

*Among the changing months May stands confessed
The sweetest and in fairest colors dressed.*

—THOMSON.

Surely the poet sang truly. We would not forget Lowell’s challenge “What is so rare as a day in June,” but as we sit here on the top of a limestone cliff nearly a hundred feet above the bed of the creek, and watch the red sun brightening the gray of the eastern sky, while the robins and the meadow larks are singing joyous matins we steep our senses in the delicate colorings of earth and sky that signalize the awakening of another

day and the real revival of another year. April was encouraging, but there were many bare boughs and many of the last year's leaves still clung to the oaks and made a conspicuous feature of the landscape. The leafy

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month of June will show us more foliage, but it will be of a darker and more uniform shade of green. Now, as the sun rises higher and sends his rays through both the woodlands and the brushlands we thrill with delight at the kaleidoscope of color. There are no withered leaves to mar the beauty now. Seen in mass, and at a distance, the woodlands are a soft cinerous purple. But the tops, where the ruddy rays of the sun are glancing, are a hazy cloud of tender green, pink, yellow and pale purple. Nearer trees show in their opening leaves pale tints of the same gorgeous colors which we see in the fall. The maple keys and the edges of the tender leaves glow blood-red in the morning sun. The half-developed leaves of the birch and the poplar are a yellowish-green, not unlike the yellow which they show in autumn. The neatly plaited folds of the leaves of the oak display a greenish or cinerous purple, a soft and delicate presentment of the stronger colors which come in October, just as the overture gives us faint voicings of the beauty which the opera is to bring; just as Lowell's organist gives us

*"The faint auroral flushes sent
Along the wavering vista of his dream."*

The edge of the cliff is lined with shad-trees. Each twig is a plume of feathery dainty white. The drooping racemes of white blossoms, with the ruby and early-falling bracts among them look like gala decorations to fringe the way of Flora as she travels up the valley. The shad-trees have blossomed rather late. In them and under them it is fully spring. There is a sound of bees and a sense of sweetness which make us forget all the cold days and think only of the glory of the coming summer. There comes a song sparrow and perches on one of the twigs. He throws back his little head, opens his mouth and pours forth a flood of melody. Next comes a myrtle warbler, eager to show us the yellow on his crown, on his two sides and the lower part of his back. He is one of the most abundant of the warblers and one of the most charming and fearless. He perches on a hop hornbeam tree from which the catkins have just shed their yellow pollen and goes over it somewhat after the manner of a chickadee or a nuthatch, showing us as he does so the white under his chin, the two heavy black marks below that, the two white cross bars on his wings, and his coat of slate color, striped and streaked with black. He goes over every twig of the little tree and then flies off to another, first pausing, however, to give his little call note "tschip, tschip" and then his little song, "Tschip-tweeter-tweeter." A pair of kingfishers, showing their blue wings and splendid crests, fly screaming down the creek. Their nest is in a tunnel four feet in the clay banks on the opposite side.



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Purple finches, a bit late in the season, are feeding on the seeds of the big elm. The snows of late April and early May must have delayed their journey northward. When the bird-designer made this bird he set out to make a different kind of sparrow, but then had pity upon the amateur ornithologist who finds the sparrows even now almost as difficult to classify as the amateur botanists do their asters; so he dipped the bird in some raspberry juice—John Burroughs says pokeberry juice—and the finch came out of the dye with a wash of raspberry red on his head, shoulders and upper breast, brightest on the head and the lower part of his back. Otherwise he looks much like an English sparrow.

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Now the belated April flowers are seen at their best, mingled with many of the May arrivals. It is such a day as that when Bryant wrote "The Old Man's Counsel." On the sloping hillsides, around the leafing hazel "gay-circles of anemones dance on their stalks." In the more open places the little wind flower, with its pretty leaves and solitary white blossoms, blooms in cheerful companionship with its fellows, and the more sterile parts of the hillside are snowed with the white plumes of the plantain-leaved everlasting. Downy yellow violets and the common blue violets grow everywhere and down on the sand near the river the birdfoot violet, with its quaintly cut leaves and handsome blossoms grows abundantly for the children who love to gather the "sand violets." On the bottom which was flooded in March the satiny yellow flowers of the marsh buttercup shine and the beautiful green of the uplands is spotted with the pure gold of the buttercup. There is no longer need to be satisfied with a few pretty flowers. May scatters her brightest and best in abundance. On the rocky slopes the wild ginger shows its red-brown, long-eared urns, the white baneberry its short white plumes, the branchlets of the bladdernut are breaking into white clusters and columbine soon will "sprinkle on the rocks a scarlet rain" as it did in Bayard Taylor's time, although the "scarlet rain," like that of the painted cup in the lowlands, grows less and less each year. The white glory of the plum thickets at its height and the hawthornes, whose young leaves have been a picture of pink and red, will soon break into blossom and vie with the crabapple thickets in calling attention to the beauty of masses of color when arranged by the Master Painter.

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The carpet of the woodlands grows softer and thicker, and more varied each day. Ferns and brakes are coming thickly. The flowers grow more splendid. The large, wholesome looking leaves of the blue bell are a fitting setting for the masses of bloom which show pink in the bud, then purple, and lastly a brilliant blue. Jack-in-the-pulpits make us smile with keen pleasure as memories of happy childhood days come crowding thickly upon us. The pretty pinnate

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leaves of the blue-flowered polemonium are sufficient explanation for the common name Jacobs-ladder, even though that name does not properly belong to our species. The purple trilliums, like the Dutchman's breeches, felt the effects of the many April and early May frosts but now they are coming into their beauty. Great colonies of umbrella-leaved May-apple are breaking into white flowers. The broad, lily-like leaves of the true and false Solomon's seal are even more attractive than their blossoms. Ferns, bellwort, wild sarsaparilla, all help to soften our footfalls, while overhead the light daily grows more subdued as the leaf-buds break and the leaves unfold. The throb of the year's life grows stronger. All the blossoms and buds which were formed last summer now break quickly into beauty. And, already, before the year has fairly started, there are signs of preparation for the following year. The dandelion is pushing up its fairy balloons, waiting for the first breeze. The shepherd's purse already shows many mature seeds below its little white blossoms. The keys of the soft maple will soon be ready to fall and send out rootlets, and the winged seeds of the white elm already lie thickly beneath the leafing branches.

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Each flower invites admiration and study. Dig up the root of the Solomon's seal, a rootstock, the botanists call it. It is long, more or less thickened and here and there is a circular scar which marks the place from which former stems have arisen. When these leaf-bearing stems die down they leave on this rootstock down in the ground, a record of their having lived. The scar looks something like a wax seal and the man who gave the plant the name of Solomon's seal had probably read that tale in the Arabian Nights, where King Solomon's seal penned up the giant genie who had troubled the fishermen.

Then there's the May-apple. Who does not remember his childhood days when he pulled the little umbrellas? Even now as they come up in little colonies, they call up memories of the fairy tales of childhood and we almost expect to see a fairy, or a brownie, or Queen Mab herself, coming from under them, when the summer shower, which makes their tops so beautifully moist gray, has passed. And they also bring to mind that charming first edition of Dr. Gray's botany, which had in it much of the man's humor as well as his learning. Too bad that the learned scientists who succeeded him have cut it out. "Common Honesty, very rare in some places," he wrote, speaking of that plant. "Ailanthus, Tree of Heaven, flowers smell of anything but heaven," was his comment on the blossoms of our picturesque importation from China. And when he came to the May-apple he wrote that the sweetish fruit was "eaten by pigs and boys." This made William Hamilton Gibson remember his own boyish gorgings and he wrote: "Think of it boys. And think of what else he says of it: 'Ovary ovoid, stigma sessile,



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undulate, seeds covering the lateral placenta, each enclosed in an aril.' Now it may be safe for pigs and billy-goats to tackle such a compound as that, but we boys all like to know what we are eating, and I cannot but feel that the public health officials of every township should require this formula of Dr. Gray's to be printed on every one of these big loaded pills, if that is what they are really made of."

Another interesting plant is the *trillium erectum*, which with the *trillium recurvatum*, is now to be found in the woods hereabouts. The flowers of the *trillium erectum* are ill scented, carrion scented, if you please. Now the botanists have found that this odor, which is so unpleasant to the human nostrils, does the plant a real service by attracting the common green flesh-flies, such as are seen in the butchershops in the summer-time. They eat the pollen, which is supposed to taste as it smells and thus as they go from flower to flower they carry pollen from one blossom to another and so secure for the plant cross-pollination.

So we may walk from one flower to another until the morning wears to a bright noon and the afternoon wanes into a songful sunset.

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In the swamp, where the red-winged blackbird is building her bulky nest between the stems of the cat tail, and the prairie marsh wren is making her second or third little globular nest in a similar place, there is a blaze of yellow from the marsh marigolds which make masses of succulent stems and leaves, crowned with pale gold, as far up the marsh as the eye can reach. In Iowa, it is in May, rather than in June, that "the cowslip startles the meadows green" and "the buttercup catches the sun in its chalice." And it is in late April or early May that "the robin is plastering his house hard by." By the way, ought not the poet to have made it "her" house? It is the mother bird who seems to do the plastering. Both birds work on the structure, but it appears to be the female who carries most of the mud and who uses her faded red apron for a trowel as she moves round in her nest pushing her breast against the round wall of the adobe dwelling to spread the mud evenly. The work on one particular nest was done in late April when there was nothing on the elm but the seed fringes to screen the builder as she worked. Then the four light greenish-blue eggs were laid. A red squirrel got one of them one day. Disregarding the squeakings and scoldings of the anxious robins, he sat on a limb holding the egg in his forepaws and bit a hole in one side of it. Then he drained the contents, dropped the shell to the ground and was about to get another egg when he was driven off. Apparently he forgot the location of the nest after that, for the other three eggs hatched out safely.

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The air is filled with bird music. It began with the larks, closely followed by the robins, and then the noise of the crows. No change in the program since the days of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* when:



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*"The busy day
Wak'd by the lark, hath roused the ribald crows."*

Then came the liquid notes of the cowbirds, like the pouring of mingled molasses and olive oil. Three handsome fellows in ebony and dark brown sit on the branch of a tall elm and just beneath them sit three brownish gray females, all in a row. Cowbird No. 1 comes nearer the end of the branch, ruffles out his head as if he were about to have a sick spell and then emits that famous molasses and oil kind of whistle, sufficient to identify the cowbird anywhere. The other males repeat his example and meanwhile the females look on with approving eyes, as if it was a vaudeville performance by amateurs in polite society. The cowbirds, male and female, are all free lovers. There is no mating among them. The female lays her eggs in some other bird's nest, like the English cuckoo, as if she were too busy with the duties and pleasures of society to care for her own children.

A diskcissel[TN-4] sits on a tree instead of a reed or a bush as usual and sings "See, see, Dick Cissel, Cissel." Chewinks are down scratching among the dry leaves with the white-throated sparrows, their strong-muscled legs sending the leaves flying as if a barnyard hen were doing the scratching. A beautiful hermit thrush is near but he is silent. The chewink in his harlequin suit of black, white, and chestnut varies his sharp and cheerful "Chewink" with a musical little strain, "Do-fah, fah-fah-fah-fah," and one of the white-throated sparrows now and then stops feeding and flies up to a hazel twig to give his sweet and plaintive little "pea-a-body, peabody, peabody." Very pretty, but not so beautiful as the three broad white stripes on his crown and the white choker under his chin.

Suddenly a brown thrasher breaks into a melody from the top of a wild cherry, and then it is as if a famous operatic coloratura soprano had joined the village choir. For power and continuity of song he is without a peer. With head erect and long tail pendant he pours forth such a flood of melody, so varied and so sweet that we forget the exquisite hymn-like notes of the wood-thrush and yield ourselves wholly to the spell of his rich recital. Make the most of it while it lasts. Like all the glories of the May woods it is evanescent. When the nest down in the brush is finished, and his mate "feels the eggs beneath her wings," his song will grow less full and rich and by the time the young birds come he will have grown silent, as if weighed down with the responsibilities of a family.

We get too near the thrasher for his liking and he slips down into the brush. And then, by rare good fortune, a blue-bird begins his song. He has been chided by some because he has a magnificent contralto voice and scarcely ever uses it. Have we not been taught to chide the man who hides his talent in a napkin, or his light under a bushel? But how he can sing when he does sing! This is one of the mornings. The rich contralto thrush-like melody, with its ever recurring "sol-la," "sol-la," fills the woodlands with beauty. It is as if the pearly gates had been opened for a brief interval to let the earth hear the "quiring of the young-eyed cherubims."



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In later May, the season “betwixt May and June,” beauty and fragrance and melody comes in a rich flood. The flaming breast of the oriole and the wondrous mingling of colors in the multiplied warblers glint like jewels among the ever enlarging leaves. The light in the woodlands becomes more subdued and the carpet of ferns and flowers grows richer and more beautiful. The vireos, the cardinal and the tanager add to the brilliancy and the ovenbird and veery to the melody. As good old John Milton once wrote: “In these vernal seasons of the year, when the air is clear and pleasant, it were an injury and a sullenness against nature not to go out and see her riches, and partake of her rejoicing with heaven and earth.”

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The beauty of the world is at every man’s door, if he will only pause to see. It offers every man real riches if only he will now and then quit his muckraking or pause from paying his life for a cap and bells. It sweetens honest labor, helps earthly endeavor, strengthens human affection and leads the soul naturally from the beauty of this world to the greater beauty of that which is to come.

WALKS IN JUNE WOODS AND FIELDS

VI. WALKS IN JUNE WOODS AND FIELDS.

*Whether we look or whether we listen
We can hear life murmur or see it glisten.*
—LOWELL.

As we walk along the bank of the creek on a warm afternoon in June we realize how true are these lines of Lowell. The frog chorus is dying down, though now and then we catch sight of a big fellow blowing out his big balloon throat and filling the air with a hoarse bass, while another across the creek has a bagpipe apparently as big but pitched in a higher key. Two months ago one could not get near enough to see this queer inflation, but now the frogs do not seem so shy. Garter snakes wiggle through the grass down the bank of the creek and the crickets are just beginning to chirp the love chorus which is soon to swell incessantly till the fall frosts come. Butterflies, dragon flies, saw flies and gall flies are busy and we see evidences of their work in the crimson galls on the willow leaves and the purple-spotted oak apples, some of which have fallen to the ground from the scarlet oak above. Nature’s first great law is the perpetuation of species, and everything we see in the June woods and fields, from the giant white oak to the busy ant, is diligently obeying that law. The red-winged blackbird circles over our heads with sharp, anxious chirps, for we have disturbed the young red-wings down in the sedge who are taking their first lessons in flying. The catbird’s nest, with four



greenish-blue eggs, is in a wild gooseberry bush and the catbird is up among the shade-trees feasting on the ripening June berries. The gentle notes of soft pedal music come floating sweetly down.

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Did you ever stop long enough to listen to the full song of the catbird? First, the brilliant, ringing strains, often softening into a subdued sympathetic melody, and then, just as the music seems almost divine, the long cat-like squeal which ends it all—much like an old organist and choirmaster of boyhood days who used to break in with a horrible discord at the lower end of the keyboard when the anthem rehearsal wasn't going to his liking.

A fruit-lover is the catbird, beginning with the June berries on the banks of streams near which she often builds her nest and continuing with wild strawberries, blackberries, wild grapes and the berries of the Virginia creeper—sometimes also seen busily scooping out a big hole on the rosy side of a tempting apple in the orchard. Some observers say the catbird eats the eggs of the fly-catcher and other birds, but this must be seen to be believed.

There comes an outbreak of melody from the top of a tall black willow, much like the tones of the robin and yet suggestive of the warbling vireo, but finer than the former, clearer, louder and richer than the latter. We lift our eyes and see the pointed carmine shield of the rose-breasted grosbeak, one of the most beautiful, useful and music-full birds in the forest or the garden. Many mornings and evenings during the month of May one of these handsome fellows was busy in my garden, diligently picking the potato bugs from the young vines, stopping now and then, especially in his morning visits, to pour out a happy, ringing lyric and to show his handsome plumage. On one occasion he took a couple of potato bugs in his "gros" beak as he flew to the nearby woodland, probably a tempting morsel for his spouse's breakfast. A bird that can sing better than a warbling vireo, whose carmine breast is comparable only to the rich, red rose of June, who picks bugs from potato vines, singing chansons meanwhile and who is so good to his wife that he does a large share of the incubation, and takes largely upon himself the care of their children is surely a "rara avis" and worth having for a friend. He is a typical bird of June. His color matches the June roses, his songs are full and sweet and rich as the June days, and the eggs of his soberly dressed spouse are usually laid and hatched in June. There is a nest in a hawthorn bush where the wild grape twines her crimson-green clusters and by the time the blossoms break and fill the air with fragrance, no accidents coming meanwhile, four young grosbeaks will be the pride of as warm a paternal heart as ever beat in bird or human breast.

Perceiving that we are watching him the grosbeak ceases his ringing tones and drops into that dreamy, soft, melodious warble, which is characteristic of this songster as it is of the catbird. But he leaves when a belted kingfisher comes screaming along the stream.

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But there is more of interest on the willow. Unseen till now, no fewer than three nighthawks are squatted lengthwise on its lower limbs, two on one limb and one on another. Strange we did not see them before, but the explanation is the grosbeak was singing. They are as motionless and apparently lifeless as if they had been mummified or petrified for a thousand years. Their mottled back and rusty feathers, their heads drawn down and eyes almost closed, make them look like uncanny visitants from beyond the Styx. Poe's raven was not so ominous and strangely silent; these will not say even the one word, "Nevermore." They look like relics of a Saturnian reign before beauty and music and joy were known upon the earth. If there were charred stumps of trees in the Bracken which was shown to Faust, we should expect to see nighthawks squatted on them, wholly indifferent to the lamentations of lost souls. We go directly under the branch where one of them is sitting ten feet above and still he makes no sign. We throw a clod, but yet there is no movement of his wings. Not till a stick hits the limb close to where he is sitting does he stretch his long wings with their telltale white spots and fly rapidly away. And the other two sit unmoved. But some night we hear the whirr of the nighthawk's wings as he drops rapidly from a great height, or we see him skimming close to the surface of the stream in search of insects in some twilight hour and then he is the embodiment of strength, agility, and swiftness. And some day we perchance find the two dirt colored eggs on the bare ground, or the tiny young, like bits of rabbit fur, with only the earth beneath them and the sky above them, apparently as deserted and destitute as Romulus and Remus; and all this adds wonderfully to our interest in this strange bird, which is so common in the June woods.

The whip-poor-will is much like the nighthawk. Both are of about the same size and color. Both sit lengthwise on limbs. Both are weird creatures that sleep by day and hunt by night. But the nighthawk has a V-shaped patch of white on his throat; the large mouth of the whip-poor-will is fringed with bristles. The nighthawk has a patch of white extending through his long wings; the whip-poor-will has none. The nighthawk is not usually heard after the twilight hours; the whip-poor-will is heard much later. The whip-poor-will calls its name aloud, sometimes startlingly close to the chamber window; the nighthawk only screams.

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We cautiously approach a sand flat and are fortunate to see one of the sights of a lifetime. The mud turtle is preparing to lay her eggs in the moist sand. She digs the hole almost entirely with her hind feet, using first one and then the other, working rapidly for perhaps eight or ten minutes until the hole is about six inches in diameter and apparently about three or four inches deep. Then she draws in her head, and drops, at intervals of two or three minutes,

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five eggs into the hole. That done, she scrapes the moist sand back into the hole, pressing it and patting it from time to time with her hind feet. This process takes much longer than digging the hole. When it is done to her satisfaction she waddles towards the creek. You might have some trouble to find the eggs but the skunk often gets them. Does the mother turtle watch over them till they are hatched by the sun or is it a mere picked-up crowd of youngsters that we sometimes see in the early fall sitting with her on a boulder in the pond?

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We follow the scarlet tanager up a wide glen where wholesome smelling brake grows almost shoulder high. Suddenly there comes from our feet a sharp, painful cry, as of a human being in distress, and the ruffed grouse, commonly called pheasant, leaves her brood of tiny, ginger-yellow chicks—eight, ten, twelve—more than we can count,—little active bits of down about the size of a golf ball, scattering here, there, and everywhere to seek the shelter of bush, bracken, or dried leaves, while their mother repeats that plaintive whine, again and again, as she tries to lead us up the hillside away from them. When we look for them again they are all safely hidden; not one can be seen. The mother desperately repeats her whining cry to entice us away and we walk on up to the top of the hill and away to relieve her anxiety. Anon we hear her softly clucking as she gathers her scattered brood.

The scarlet tanager's nest is on the horizontal limb of a big white oak. But it is not the familiar, striking, scarlet, black-winged bird, which sits on the ragged nest. The female is dressed in sober olive-green above and olive-yellow below, with dusky wings and tail. Probably many an amateur has found this bird down by the river and tried to classify her among the fly-catchers until the coming of her handsome husband caused him to remember that in birdland it is usually only the male part of the population which wears the handsome clothes, just as the Indian braves wear the gaudiest paint and the showiest feathers. It is not till we get to the higher stages of civilization that this rule is reversed.

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The foliage of the June woods has not the delicacy of tints which was so exquisite in May, nor the strength of color which will be so striking in September. But it has a beauty no less admirable. The chlorophyll in the leaf-cells is now at its prime and the leaves very closely approach a pure green, especially those of the sycamore, which is the nearest to a pure green of any tree in the forest. Standing in the wood road which runs along the top of a timbered crest we look across a broad, wooded valley where the leaves seem to exhale a soft, yellowish green in the bright sunlight. Beyond and above

them, five miles away, and yet apparently very near, a belt of bluish green marks the timber fringe of the next water course.

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Still farther, another unseen stretch of corn land intervening, the forest crowned ridge meets the soft sky in a line of lavender, as if it were a strata cloud lying low on the horizon. From this distance the lavender and purple are almost changeless every sunny day the year around. Always the Enchanted Land and the Delectable Mountains over across the valley. How like the alluring prospect across the valley of years! Always the same soft lavender haze there, while the woods here run through all the gamut of color, from the downy pinks and whites and the tender greens of spring through the deeper greens of summer to the crimson and scarlet of the fall, and the russets, grays, and coffee-browns of the winter. When the foliage of the forest has deepened into one dark shade of verdure then we know that June is far spent, spring has gone and summer is here. The uniform green is not monotonous. See the woods in the hour before sunset when the slanting light gives the foliage consummate glory. See them again in the white light of a clear noon when the glazed leaves seem to reflect a white veil over the pure verdure; and again when the breeze ripples through the leafy canopy, showing the silvery under-surfaces of the maple leaves, the neat spray of the river birches, the deeply cleft leaves of the scarlet oak and the finely pinnate leaves of the honey locust. Each has a glory now peculiar to itself and to June.

There is much beauty of color in the woodland undergrowth. Tall torches touched with the crimson of the sunset sky are made of the shell-bark hickory whose inner bud scales enlarge into enormous, leathery bracts, often crimsoning into rare brilliance. Circles of creamy white here and there among the hazel brush mark the later blossoms of the sweet viburnum. Sweeping curves like sculptured arms bearing thickly clustered hemispheres of purplish white are seen on the rocky slope where the nine-bark grows above the lingering columbines. White wands which look so beautiful are merely the ends of the common tall blackberry, and the wild rose sweetens the same banks. Flattish clusters of creamy white blossoms are the loose cymes of the red osier dogwood, but it is not nearly so beautiful now as it was last January when its blood-red stems made a striking contrast with the snow. The bright carmine bark has faded to a dull green and the shrub is a disappointment now, despite its blossoms. So is the cottonwood a disappointment. Its wealth of shining green foliage is beautiful, yet we sigh for the lost glory of the midwinter days when the horizontal rays of the setting sun made aureoles of golden light around its yellow, shining limbs.

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It is worth while on a walk in June to sit and look at the grass. How tame and dreary would be the landscape without it! How soul starved would have been mankind, condemned to live without the restfulness of its unobtrusive beauty! That is why the first command, after the waters had been gathered into one place and the dry land appeared, was, "Let the earth bring forth grass." The grasses cover the earth like a beautiful garment from Kerguelen land in the Antarctic regions to the extreme limit of vegetation beyond the Polar circle. They climb the Andes, the Rockies, and the Himalayas to the very line of eternal snow, and they creep to the bottom of every valley where man dares set his foot. They come up fresh and green from the melting snows of earliest spring and linger in sunny autumn glens when all else is dead and drear. They give intense interest to the botanist as he remembers that there are thirty-five hundred different species, a thousand of which are in North America and a fourth of that number in our own state. They give him delightful studies as he patiently compares their infinite variations of culms and glumes, spikes, racemes, and panicles. They give joy to the farmer with their wealth of protein and fat and albuminoid, the material to do the work and make the wealth of the world bulging from their succulent stems. And they are fascinating most of all to the nature-lover as he sees them gently wave in the June sunshine or flow like a swift river across the field before a quick gust of wind. Such variety of color! Here an emerald streak and there a soft blue shadow, yonder a matchless olive green, and still farther a cool gray: spreading like an enamel over the hillside where the cattle have cropped them, and waving tall and fine above the crimsoning blossoms of the clover; glittering with countless gems in the morning dews and musicful with the happy songs and call notes of the quail and prairie chicken, the meadow lark, the bob-o-link, and the dickcissel whose young are safe among the protection of the myriad stems. Tall wild rice and wild rye grow on the flood-plain and by the streams where the tall buttercups shine like bits of gold and the blackbirds have their home; bushy blue stem on the prairies and in the open woods where the golden squaw weed and the wild geranium make charming patterns of yellow and pink and purple and some of the painted cup left over from May still glows like spots of scarlet rain; tall grama grass on the dry prairies and gravelly knolls, whitened by the small spurge and yellowed by the creeping cinquefoil; nodding fescue in the sterile soils where the robin's plantain and the sheep sorrel have succeeded the early everlasting; satin grasses in the moist soil of the open woodlands where the fine white flowers of the Canada anemone blow, and slough grass in the marshy meadows where the white-crossed flowers of the sharp spring are fading, and the woolly stem of the bitter boneset is lengthening; reed grass and floating manna



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grass in the swamps where the broad arrow leaves of the sagittaria fringe the shore and the floating leaves and fragrant blossoms of the water lilies adorn the pond. The three days' rain beginning with a soft drizzle and increasing into a steady storm which drives against the face with cutting force and shakes in sheets like waving banners across the wind-swept prairie only adds more variety to the beauties of the grass; and when the still, sweet morning comes, the pure green prairies make us feel that all stain of sin and shame has been washed from the world.

Where the grasses grow the best, there Providence has provided most abundantly for the wealth and the comfort of mankind. The rich verdure of the meadows is the visible sign of the fruitful soil beneath the fattening clouds above. The clover and the early hay fill the June fields with fragrance and the grass in the parks and lawns invite toil-worn bodies to rest and comfort. What wonder Bryant wished to die in June, the month when the grasses tenderly creep over the mounds above tired dust and gently soothe the grief of the loved ones left behind.

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The cold May seemed to detract little from the beauty and interest of the woodlands. The warblers, the humming bird, the tanager, the bob-o-link, the ovenbird, the vireos, the chat, the red start, the oriole, the dickcissel, the black-billed cuckoo, all greeted their friends as numerous as ever. So with the flowers: the columbine, the shooting star, the painted cup, the puccoon, the beautiful though inodorous large white trillium, the delicate little corydalis, the star grass and the lady's slipper, all came within a week of their average time in spite of the cold, and the showy orchis was only just over into June. May added fifty-four new species of flowers to the April list, according to the record of a single observer whose leisure is limited. Those who added the forty odd May arrivals in bird land to their April lists may have no such thrilling walks in June, but they may study their feathered friends of the summer, which is better, and if passion for new lists is not satiated, try the flowers instead of the birds. June should yield a list of a hundred twenty-five different species, not including the grasses, and a very diligent flower-lover will make it much longer.

Transcriber's Note

The following typographical errors were maintained in this version of this book.

Page Error

TN-1 21 anl should read and

TN-2 23 live stock for livestock



TN-3 31 “sunburst.’ has the wrong type of close quote
TN-4 47 diskcissel should read dickcissel

Inconsistent hyphenation:

bell-wort / bellwort blood-root / bloodroot blue-bird / blue bird fly-catchers / flycatchers
music-full / musicful root-stock / rootstock whip-poor-will / whippoorwill wood-thrush /
woodthrush