

Some Summer Days in Iowa eBook

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Contents

Some Summer Days in Iowa eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Page 1.....	4
Page 2.....	6
Page 3.....	7
Page 4.....	8
Page 5.....	9
Page 6.....	11
Page 7.....	12
Page 8.....	13
Page 9.....	14
Page 10.....	15
Page 11.....	16
Page 12.....	18
Page 13.....	19
Page 14.....	20
Page 15.....	21
Page 16.....	22
Page 17.....	24
Page 18.....	25
Page 19.....	26
Page 20.....	27
Page 21.....	28
Page 22.....	29
Page 23.....	30

Page 24.....	31
Page 25.....	32
Page 26.....	33
Page 27.....	35
Page 28.....	36
Page 29.....	37
Page 30.....	38
Page 31.....	39
Page 32.....	40
Page 33.....	41
Page 34.....	42
Page 35.....	43
Page 36.....	44
Page 37.....	46



Page 1

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Some Summer Days in Iowa

BY

Frederick John Lazell

A book of the seasons, each page of which should be written in its own season and out of doors, or in its own locality, wherever it may be.—Thoreau

*Cedar Rapids, Iowa
the torch Press
Nineteen hundred Nine*

*Copyright 1909
by
Fred J. Lazell*

[Illustration: "Has cut its way straight down the face of A cliff" (p. 111)]

PREFACE

Like the two preceding little volumes of this series, this book seeks to show something of what Iowa has to offer to the man who loves the out-of-doors. There is nothing very unusual in it. The trees and the flowers, the birds and the small wild animals which it mentions and describes are such as may be seen in the Iowa fields and woods by anyone who cares enough about them to walk amid their haunts. The illustrations are such as the ordinary nature lover may "take" for himself with his pocket kodak. The

woodthrush built in a thicket by the bungalow and borrowed a paper napkin for her nest. The chipmunk came every morning for his slice of bread. And then the woodchuck learned to be unafraid.

It has long been the author's belief that Iowa has just as much to offer the nature lover as any other part of the world—that she has indeed a richer flora than many states—and that every true lowan ought to know something of her trees and shrubs and herbs, her birds and animals, and to feel something of the beauty of her skies and her landscapes. There is so much beauty all around us, every day of the year, shall we not sometimes lift our eyes to behold it?

The majority of Iowa people still find pleasure in the simple life, still have the love for that which Nature so freely bestows. They find time to look upon the beauty of the world. Many a busy man finds his best recreation in the woods and fields. It may be only a few hours each week, but it is enough to keep the music of the flowing waters ever in his ears and the light of the sunshine in his eyes. It is enough to give the men and the women of the state wholesome views of life, happy hearts and broad sympathies. Some few find in the woods and fields thoughts and feelings which are, to them, almost akin to religion. If this little book helps such lovers of the out-of-doors ever so little; if it shall help others to see for themselves the beauty and the joy and the goodness of this world in which we live, the author will feel that it has been worth while.

Page 2

VII.—AN OLD ROAD IN JULY

In the old woods road a soft haze hung, too subtle to see save where its delicate colorings were contrasted against the dark green leaves of the oaks beyond the fence. Not the tangible, vapory haze of early morning, but a tinted, ethereal haze, the visible effluence of the summer, the nimbus of its power and glory. From tall cord grasses arching over the side of the road, drawing water from the ditch in which their feet were bathed and breathing it into the air with the scent of their own greenness; from the transpiration of the trees, shrubs and vines, flowers and mosses and ferns, from billions of pores in acres of leaves it came streaming into the sunlight, vanishing quickly, yet ever renewed, as surely as the little brook where the grasses drank and the grackles fished for tadpoles and young frogs, was replenished by the hidden spring. Mingled with it and floating in it was another stream of life, the innumerable living organisms that make up the dust of the sunshine. Pink and white, black and yellow spores from the mushrooms over the fence in the pasture; pollen pushed from the glumes of the red top grasses and the lilac spires of the hedge nettle and germander by the roadside; shoals of spores from the mosses and ferns by the trees and in the swamp; all these life particles rose and floated in the haze, giving it tints and meanings strangely sweet. When a farmer's buggy passed along the old road the haze became a warm pink, like some western sky in the evening, slowly clearing again to turquoise as the dust settled. Viewed in this way, the haze became a mighty, broad-mouthed river of life, fed by billions of tiny streams and moving ever toward the vast ocean of the sunlight. Faintly visible to the discerning eye, it was also audible to the attentive ear, listening as one listens at the edge of a field in the night time to hear the growing of the corn. If all the millions of leaves had ceased their transpiration, if this flow of life had been shut off, as the organist pushes in the tremolo stop, the sound of the summer would not have been the same. Something of the strength and joy of the summer was in it. Drinking deeply of it the body was invigorated and the heart grew glad. In it the faith of the winter's buds and the hope of the spring's tender leaves found rich fulfillment. Theirs was a life of hope and promise that the resurrection should come; this was the glorious life after the resurrection, faith lost in sight and patient hope crowned.

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Page 3

Slender white minarets of the Culver's root, rising from green towers above the leafy architecture of the woodland undergrowth and reaching toward the light of the sky, told the time of the year as plainly as if a muezzin had appeared on one of its leafy balconies and proclaimed a namaz for the middle of July. Beholding them from afar, honey bees came on humming wings for the nectar lying deep in their tiny florets. Eager stamens reached out far beyond the blossoms to brush the bees' backs with precious freights of pollen to be transported to the stigmas of older flowers. Playing each its part in the plan of the universe, flower and insect added its mite to the life and the loveliness of the summer. From the sunshine and the soil-water the long leaves manufactured food for the growth of the plant. Prettily notched, daintily tapering, and arranged in star-like whorls about the stem, they enhanced the beauty of the flowers above them and attracted the observer to the exquisite order governing their growth. When the leaves were arranged in whorls of four, the floral spires were quadruple, like the pinnacles on a church tower; if the green towers were hexagonal, then six white minarets pointed to the sky. The perfect order of the solar system and the majesty of the Mind which planned it, was manifested in this single plant. So does beauty lead the way to the mountain tops of truth. By the road of earthly beauty we may always reach religion and truth is ever beckoning us to new and nobler visions. That "thread of the all-sustaining beauty, which runs through all and doth all unite" gently leads us from the things which are tangible and temporal to the truths which are spiritual and eternal; from the beauty of the concrete to the beauty of the abstract, onward along the road of beauty and farther up the heights of truth until our admiration for the beauty of the sunrise, the snow crystal, the graceful spray of the trees in winter, the exquisite order and harmony of the universe from the orbit of the largest planet to the flow of life in the tiniest leaf, develops into a lasting love for beauty in life and in character; and still farther up the heights into an atmosphere of intelligent, rational, genuine love for the Great First Cause of all beauty. As the heart opens to receive the beauty of the world, as the mind and soul strive, like the plants, for the highest development, so is the world redeemed from error and crime and the perfection of the race is attained. If one soul finds this truth more quickly and easily here amid the trees and flowers, for him is the old road greater than religious dogmas or social systems.

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Page 4

Always beautiful and interesting, in these long days of mid-July the old road is at its best. No length of day can measure its loveliness or encompass its charm. Very early in the morning there is a faint rustle of the leaves, a delicate flutter through the woods as if the awakening birds are shaking out their wings. Shrubs and bushes and trunks of trees have ghostly shapes in the few strange moments that are neither the darkness nor the dawn. As the light steals through the woods their forms grow less grotesque. In the half light a phoebe begins her shrill song. A blue-jay screams. The quail sounds his first "Bob White." Brown thrashers in the thicket—it is past their time of singing—respond with a strange, sibilant sound, a mingled hiss and whistle, far different from his ringing songs of May, now only memories; different also from her scoldings when she was disturbed on her nest and from her tender crooning calls to her babies during June.

As the light increases waves of delicate color appear in the sky to the northeast, and by and by the sun's face appears over the tops of the trees. He shoots arrows of pale flame through the woods. In the clearing the trunks of the trees are like cathedral pillars, and the sunlight comes down in slanting rays as if the openings among the tree-tops were windows and the blue haze beneath the incense of the morning mass. Black-capped precentor of the avian choir, the chickadee sounds two sweet tones, clear and musical, like keynotes blown from a silver pipe. The wood thrush sounds a few organ tones, resonant and thrilling. It is almost his last summer service; soon, like the thrashers, he will be drooping and silent. The chewink, the indigo bird, the glad goldfinches, the plaintive pewees are the sopranos; the blue-bird, the quail, with her long, sweet call, and the grosbeak, with his mellow tones, are the altos; the nuthatch and the tanager take up the tenor, while the red-headed woodpeckers, the crows and the cuckoos bear down heavy on the bass. Growing with the light, the fugue swells into crescendo. Lakes of sunshine and capes of shadow down the old road are more sharply defined. Bushes of tall, white melilot, clustered with myriads of tiny flowers, exhale a sweet fragrance into the morning air. The clearing around the house is flooded with sunlight. In the wooded pasture some trunks are bathed with a golden glory, while others yet stand iron gray in the deep shadows. The world is awake. The day's work begins. One late young redhead in a hole high up in the decaying trunk of an aspen tree calls loudly for his breakfast, redoubling his noise as his mother approaches with the first course. Sitting clumsily on a big stump, a big baby cowbird, well able to shift for himself, shamelessly takes food from his little field sparrow foster-mother, scarcely more than half his size. Soon he will leave her and join the flocks of his kindred in the oat-fields and the swamps. Young

Page 5

chewinks are being fed down among the ripening May-apples in the pasture. A catbird with soft "quoots" assembles her family in the hazel and the wood-thrush sounds warning "quirts" as fancied peril approaches her children beneath the ripening blackberries. From the top of a tall white oak a red squirrel leaps to the arching branches of an elm, continuing his foraging there. Sitting straight up on a mossy log the chipmunk holds in his paws a bit of bread thrown from somebody's basket, nibbles at it for a while and then makes a dash for the thicket, carrying the bread in his mouth.

[Illustration: *"Every tree is A picture"* (p. 22)]

Tiny rabbits venture out from the tall grasses and look on life with timid eyes. Bees and butterflies are busy with the day's work. Life with its beauty and its joy is everywhere abundant. Living things swim in and upon the brook, insects run and leap among the grasses, winged creatures are in the shrubs, the trees, the air, active, eager, beautiful life is everywhere. The heart thrills with the beauty, the joy, the zest, the abundance of it, expands to a capacity for the amplitude of it. Human life grows sweeter, richer, more worth while. There is so much to live for, so much to hope for; this is the meaning and the glory of the summer.

* * * * *

Farther out, where the old road leaves the woods, the landscape is like a vast park, more beautiful than many a park which the world calls famous. From the crest of the ridge the fields roll away in graceful curves, dotted with comfortable homes and groves and skirted by heavy timber down in the valley where the sweet water of the river moves quietly over the white sand. Still responding to the freshening impulse of the June rains, fields and woods are all a-quiver with growth. By master magic soil-water and sunshine are being changed into color and form to delight the eye and food to do the world's work. Every tree is a picture, each leaf is as fresh and clean as the rain-washed air of the morning. From the low meadows the perfume of the hay is brought up by the languid breeze. Amber oat-fields are ripening in the sun and in the corn-fields there is a sense of the gathering force of life as the sturdy plants lift themselves higher and higher during

*"The long blue solemn hours, serenely flowing
Whence earth, we feel, gets steady help and good."*

Many a tourist comes home to a land like this, weary and penniless, like Sir Launfal after his fruitless quest, to discover that the grail of health and rest and beauty which he sought afar so strenuously is most easily and readily found at home.

* * * * *

[Illustration: "*Curves which add much to its wild beauty*" (p. 23)]

Page 6

Ceaselessly up and down the old road passes the pageant of the year, never two days the same, especially at this season. In the middle of the road is a dirt wagon-track, on either side of which is a broad belt of grass, flowers, shrubs and small trees till you come to the fence. Beyond one fence the thick woods has a heavy undergrowth; over the other is a well-wooded pasture. On the south side, between the road and the fence there is a little brook, sometimes with a high, mossy and timbered bank, sometimes completely hidden by tall grasses. The road rises and falls in gentle grades, with alternating banks and swales. At one high point there is a view down the long avenue of trees across the open valley beyond, where the city lies snugly, and then upward to the timber on the far heights across the river where the hills are always softly blue, no matter what the season of the year. Sometimes the old road sweeps around fine old trees in unmathematical curves which add much to its wild beauty. The first man who drove along it, a hundred years or more ago, followed a cow-path and the road hasn't changed much since, though the fences which were later threaded through the shrubs and trees on either side, run straighter. Never was summer day long enough for me to see and to study all that the old road had to show. Here, at the moist edge of the road, the ditch stone-crop is opening its yellow-green flowers, each one a study in perfect symmetry. With the showy, straw-colored cyperus it flourishes under the friendly shade of the overhanging cord-grasses whose flowering stalks already have shot up beyond the reach of a man. Among them grows the tall blue vervain, its tapering fingers adorned with circles of blue flowers, like sapphire rings passing from the base to the tips of the fingers. You must part these grasses and pass through them to see the thicket of golden-rod making ready for the yellow festival later on. White cymes of spicy basil are mingled with the purple loosestrife and back of these the fleabanes lift daisy-like heads among the hazel overhanging the wire fence. Then the elms and the oaks and in the openings the snowy, starry campion whose fringed petals are beginning to close, marking the morning's advance. In the moist places the Canada lily glows like a flaming torch, its pendant bells slowly swinging in the breeze, ringing in the annual climax and jubilee of the flowering season.

Across the road the monkey flower grins affably at the edge of the grass and the water hemlock, with a hollow stem as big as a gun-barrel and tall as a man, spreads its large umbels of tiny white flowers on curving branches like a vase-shaped elm in miniature. Twice or thrice pinnate leaves, toothed like a tenon saw, with conspicuous veins ending in the notches, brand it as the beaver poison, otherwise known as the musquash root and spotted cowbane. From its tuberous roots was prepared the poison which Socrates drank without fear; why should he fear death?

Page 7

Does he not still live among us? Does he not question us, teach us? Yellow loose-strifes and rattle-box are in the swamp, and a patch of swamp milkweed with brilliant fritillaries sipping nectar from its purple blossoms. White wands of meadow-sweet, clusters of sensitive fern, a big shrub of pussy willow with cool green leaves as grateful now as the white and gold blossoms were in April; white trunks and fluttering leaves of small aspens where the grosbeak has just finished nesting; bushy willows and withes of young poplar; nodding wool-grasses and various headed sedges; all these are between the roadside and the fence. There the elder puts out blossoms of spicy snow big as dinner-plates and the Maryland yellow-throat who has four babies in the bulky nest at the foot of the black-berry bush sits and sings his "witchity, witchity, witchity." The lark sparrow has her nest at the foot of a thistle and her mate has perched so often on a small elm near-by that he has worn several of the leaves from a topmost twig. In the late afternoons and evenings he sits there and vies with the indigo bunting who sits on the bare branches at the top of a tall red oak, throwing back his little head and pouring out sweet rills of melody. Near him is the dickcissel, incessantly singing from the twig of a crab-apple; these three make a tireless trio, singing each hour of the day. The bunting's nest is in a low elm bush close to the fence where a wee brown bird sits listening to the strains of the bright little bird above and the little dickcissels have just hatched out in the nest at the base of a tussock not very far away.

Now the evening primrose at the side of the road has folded all its yellow petals, marking the near approach of noon. Growing near it on this rise of the road are lavender-flowered bergamot, blue and gold spiderwort, milkweeds in a purple glory, black-eyed Susans basking in the sun, cone-flowers with brown disks and purple petals, like gypsy maidens with gaudy summer shawls. Closer to the fence are lemon-yellow coreopsis with quaint, three-cleft leaves; thimble weeds with fruit columns half a finger's length; orange-flowered milkweed, like the color of an oriole's back, made doubly gay by brilliant butterflies and beetles. On the sandy bank which makes the background for this scene of splendor, the New Jersey tea, known better as the red-root, lifts its feathery white plumes above restful, gray-green leaves. Just at the fence the prairie willow has a beauty all its own, with a wealth of leaves glossy dark green above and woolly white below.

There's a whine as if someone had suddenly struck a dog and a brownish bird runs crouching through the grass while little gingery-brown bodies scatter quickly for their hiding places. It was near here that the quail had her nest in June and these are her babies. I reach down and get one, a little bit of a chick scarcely bigger than the end of my thumb. The mother circles around, quite near, with alarm and distress until I back away and watch. Then she comes forward, softly clucking, and soon gathers her chickens under her wings.

Page 8

Similar behavior has the ruffed grouse which you may still find occasionally in the deeper woods. Stepping over the fallen tree you send the little yellow-brown babies scattering, like fluffy golf-balls rolling for cover. Invariably the old bird utters a cry of pain and distress, puts her head down low and skulks off through the grass and ferns while the chicks hasten to hide themselves. Your natural inclination is to follow the mother, and then she will take very short flights, alternated with runs in the grass, until she has led you far from her family. Then a whirr of strong wings and she is gone back to the cover where she clucks them together. But if you first turn your attention to the chicks the mother will turn on her trail, stretch out her long, broad, banded tail into a beautiful fan, ruffle up the feathers on either side of her neck and come straight towards you. Often she will stretch her neck and hiss at you like a barn-yard goose. There is a picture of the ruffed grouse worth while. You will learn more about the ruffed grouse in an experience like this than you can find in forty books. If you pause to admire this turkey-gobbler attitude of the grouse she thinks she has succeeded in attracting your attention. The tail fan closes and droops, the wings fall, the ruffs smooth down. With her head close to the ground, she once more attempts to lead you from her children. If you are heartless enough you may again hunt for the chicks and back will come the old bird again, almost to your feet, with feathers all outstretched.

* * * * *

Creamy clusters of the bunch-flower rise from the brink of the brook and near-by there are the large leaves of the arrow-head, with its interesting stalk, bearing homely flowers below and interesting chalices of white and gold above. Shining up through the long grasses, the five-pointed white stars of the little marsh bell-flower are no more dismayed by the stately beauty of the tall blue bell-flower over the fence, with its long strings of blossoms set on edge like dainty Delft-blue saucers, than the Pleiades are shamed by the splendor of Aldebaran and Betelgeuse on a bright night in November. Clover-like heads of the milkwort decorate the bank, and among the mosses around the bases of the trees the little shin-leaf lifts its pretty white racemes.

Twisting and twining among the hazel, long stems of wild yam display pretty leaves in graceful strings, each leaf set at the angle which secures the greatest amount of light. On the wire fence the bittersweet hangs and reaches from thence to the top of the low hawthorne, seeking the strength of the sun for the ripening of its pods, which slowly change from green to yellow as the month advances. Thickly-prickled stems of green-brier, the wild smilax, rise to the height of the choke-cherry shrubs and the branches lift themselves by means of two tendrils on each leaf-stalk to the most favorable positions for the sunlight.

Page 9

Under these broad leaves the catbird is concealed. Elegant epicurean, he is sampling the ripening choke-cherries. He complains querulously at being disturbed, flirts his tail and flies. Stout branches of sumac, with bark colored and textured much like brown egg-shell, sustain a canopy of wild grape, the clusters of green fruit only partly hidden by the broad leaves. Curiously beautiful are the sumac's leaves, showing long leaf-stalks of pink purple and pretty leaflets strung regularly on either side. The sumac's fruit, unlike the grape's, seeks no concealment; proudly lifting its glowing torches above the leafy canopy, it lights the old road for the passing of the pageant of summer. From greenish gold to scarlet, swiftly changing to carmine, terra cotta, crimson and garnet, so glows and deepens the color in the torches. When comes the final garnet glow not even the cold snows of winter can quench it.

[Illustration: "*The sumac's torches light up the old road*" (p. 35)]

Around the fence-post, where the versi-colored fungus grows, the moon-seed winds its stems, like strands of twine. Its broad leaves are set like tilted mirrors to catch and reflect the light. Trailing among the grass the pea-vine lifts itself so that its blossoms next month shall attract the bees. The wild hop is reaching over the bushes for the branches of the low-growing elm from which to hang its fruit clusters. Circling up the trunk and the spreading branches of the elm, the Virginia creeper likewise strives for better and greater light. Flower and vine, shrub and tree, each with its own peculiar inherited tendencies resulting from millions of years of development, strives ever for perfection. Shall man, with the civilization of untold centuries at his back to push him on, do less? Endowed with mind and heart, with spiritual aspirations and a free will, shall he dare cease to grow? Equipped so magnificently for the light, dare he deliberately seek the darkness and allow his mental and spiritual fruits to wither? These are questions to ponder as the afternoon shadows lengthen.

If you walk through the wooded pasture, close by the side of the roadside fence, the hollow stumps hold rain-water, like huge tankards for a feast. Sometimes a shaft of sunlight shoots into the water, making it glow with color. Fungi in fantastic shapes are plentiful. Growing from the side of a stump, the stem of the fawn-colored pluteus bends upwards to the light. Golden clavarias cover fallen trunks with coral masses and creamy ones are so delicately fragile that you almost fear to touch them lest you mar their beauty. Brown brackets send out new surfaces of creamy white on which the children may stencil their names. That vivid yellow on a far stump is the sulphur-colored polyporus. Green and red Russulas delight the eye. The lactaria sheds hot, white milk when you cut it, and the inky coprinus sheds black rain of its own accord. Puff-balls scatter their spores when you smite them and the funnel-shaped clitocybe holds water as a wine-glass holds Sauterne.

Page 10

Springing from a log lying by the fence a dozen plants of the glistening coprinus have reared themselves since morning, fresh from the rain and flavored as sweet as a nut. Narrow furrows and sharp ridges adorn their drooping caps; these in turn are decorated with tiny shining scales. Nibbling at the nut-like flesh, I am touched with the nicety, the universality of nature's appeal to the finer senses and sentiments. Here is form and color and sparkle to please the eye, flesh tender to the touch, aroma that tests the subtlest sense of smell, taste that recalls stories of Epicurean feasts, millions of life-germs among the purple-black gills, ready to float in the streams of the atmosphere to distant realms and other cycles of life. No dead log and toadstools are here, but dainty shapes with billions of possibilities for new life, new beauties, new thoughts.

* * * * *

[Illustration: *Young blue-jay trying to climb back to its nest*

"The wood thrush has A late nest in A young elm" (p. 41)

"The chipmunk holds in his paws A bit of bread" (p. 20)]

Goldfinches ride on the billows of the air, now folding their pinions and shooting silently downward into the trough of the sea, then opening their wings and beating their way upwards, singing meanwhile. Going over the woods they fly twenty to thirty feet above the tops of the tallest trees, but when they reach the meadow lands they drop to about the same height above the surface of the ground. Only a few of them are nesting yet. The tall thistle by the roadside is nearly ten feet high, but its heads have not fully opened. They like its down for their nests and its seeds to feed the fledgelings. They fly in pairs often and in the evenings they cling prettily to the catnip by the pasture fence, digging into each calyx for its four sweet nutlets. The woodthrush has a late nest in a young elm; her first family was eaten by the blue-jays just after the hatching,—so were the young grosbeaks in a nearby tree, but the cedar waxwings were slain and eaten by the cannibalistic grackles. A blue-jay is just approaching the wood pewee's nest in the burr oak, but the doughty husband does battle with the fierceness of a kingbird and chases him away. Three tiny birdlings, covered with hairs soft and white as the down of a thistle, are in the nest, which is saddled snugly to the fork of a horizontal tree. In another nest, near by, the three eggs have only just been laid. The path which used to run under the over-hanging trees is grown up with grasses. Here the slender rush grows best, and makes a dark crease among the taller and lighter-green grasses, showing where the path winds. Twenty feet overhead, on the slender branch of a white oak, is a tiny knot, looking scarcely larger

Page 11

than the cup of a mossy-cup acorn. It is the nest of the ruby-throated hummingbird, so well concealed by the leaves and by the lichens fastened to its exterior that it would not have been noticed at all but for the whirling wings of the exquisite creature a month ago. Her two tiny eggs have since been safely hatched and the young birds reared; now the nest is empty, a prize to be taken and preserved for future study and admiration.

At the foot of a figwort stalk in the pasture, shielded by a little sprig of choke-cherry and a wisp of grasses, a new nest is being builded. That is why the chewink sings so happily from dawn till dark. His summer song is now heard more often than his spring song. Through April, May and June he sings:

Fah do do'-do'-do'-do'-do'

But now, this song is heard more often:

Me' fah'-fah'-fah'-fah'-fah'

This song is more appropriate to the summer. There is more of fullness and beauty in it, more of the quality of the woodthrush's songs, for which it is often mistaken.

* * * * *

From a tiny hawthorne bush, no higher than a collie's back, a field sparrow flies nervously to a low limb of a hickory tree and begs that her nest be not disturbed. It is neatly placed in the middle of the bush about a foot from the ground, made of medium grasses and rootlets and lined with finer grasses and horsehair. The three bluish-white eggs with rufous markings at the larger end are the field-sparrow's own. Into a nest found a month ago, at the foot of a yarrow stalk, the cowbird had sneaked three speckled eggs, leaving only one of the pretty eggs of the field-sparrow. At that time the cowbirds were to be seen everywhere; they chattered every morning in the trees, and the females left their unwelcome eggs in nearly every nest. One little red-eyed vireo's nest had five cowbirds' eggs,—none of her own. But the birds which are building now are generally safe from the parasite. Only rarely is a cowbird's egg found after the middle of July. No cowbirds have been seen since the first week of the month, save the young one on the stump, which the field-sparrow was feeding this morning. They disappear early, seeking seclusion for the moulting. When they emerge from their hiding places they form into flocks, spending their days in the grain-fields and near the rivers where the food is most abundant and easy to procure. At nightfall they congregate, like the red-winged blackbirds, in the sand-bar willows on the river islands.

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Daintily flitting from one branch to another, the redstart weaves threads of reddish gold and black, like strands of night and noon, among the old trees. He has wandered over through the woods from the creek, where his mate built a cup-like nest in a crotch toward the top of a slender white oak. Busy always, he stays but a few moments and then passes on as silently as a July zephyr. The halting voice of the preacher, the red-eyed vireo, comes out of the thicket; then, from an oak overhead, where a little twig is trembling, the softer voice of the warbling vireo queries: "Can't you see it's best to sing and work like me?", with the emphasis on the "me."

Page 12

Blue-jays loiter down the old road, making short flights from tree to tree, moving in the one plane and with slowly beating wings; only rarely do they fold their wings and dip. Redheads and flickers, like the other woodpeckers, have a slightly dipping flight. They open and close their wings in quick succession, not slowly like the goldfinches; consequently their dips are not so pronounced. The line of their flight is a ripple rather than a billow.

Chickadee and his family come chattering through the pasture. They had a felt-lined nest in a fence-post during the warm days of June; now they find life easy and sweet—sweet as the two notes mingled with their chatter. Upside down they cling to the swaying twigs, romping, disheveled bird-children, full of fun and song-talk. It is nothing to them that the cruel winds and deep snows of winter will be here all too soon. Summer days are long and joyous, life stretches out before them; why waste its hours with frets and fears about the future? Another round of merry chatter and away they flit. Scarcely have they gone until a blood-red streak shoots down from the elm tree to the grass. It is the scarlet tanager. For the last half-hour his loud notes, tied together in twos, have been ringing from an ash tree in the pasture, near the spreading oak where the mother sat so closely during June. Though the nesting season is over he will sing for some weeks yet.

So they come and go through the happy golden hours; now the nasal notes of the nuthatch or the “pleek” of a downy woodpecker in the pasture, followed by the twittering tones of the chimney-swifts zigzagging across the sea of blue above, like busy tugboats darting from side to side of a harbor. Crows string over the woods close to the tops of the trees, watching with piercing eyes for lone and hapless fledglings. A cuckoo droops from a tall wild cherry tree on one side of the road to a tangle of wild grape on the other; he peers out and gives his rain-crow call. So is the warp of the summer woven of bird-flight and threaded through with song.

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When evening comes the sun’s last smiles reach far into the timber and linger lovingly on the boles of the trees with a tender beauty. Wood-flowers face the vanishing light and hold it until the scalloped edges of the oak leaves etched against the sky have been blurred by the gathering darkness. Long streams of cinnabar and orange flare up in the western sky. Salmon-colored clouds float into sight, grow gray and gradually melt away. In the dusky depths of the woods the thrush sings his thrilling, largo appassionato, requiem to the dying day. In this part of the thicket the catbirds congregate, but over yonder the brown thrashers are calling to each other. The “skirl” of the nighthawk ceases; but away through the woods, down at the creek, the whippoorwill begins her oft-repeated trinity of notes. A hoot owl calls from a near-by tree. The pungent smoke

Page 13

of the wood-fire is sweeter than incense. Venus hangs like a silver lamp in the northwest. She, too, disappears, but to the east Mars—it is the time of his opposition—shines in splendor straight down the old road, seemingly brought very near by the telescopic effect of the dark trees on either side. Sister stars look down in limpid beauty from a cloudless sky. All sounds have ceased. A fortnight hence the air will be vibrant with the calls of the katydids and the grasshoppers, but now the silence is supreme. It is good for man sometimes to be alone in the silence of the night—to pass out from the world of little things, temporary affairs, conditional duties, into the larger life of nature. There may be some feeling of chagrin at the thought how easily man passes out of the world and how readily and quickly he is forgotten; but this is of small moment compared with the sense of self reliance, of sturdy independence, which belongs to the out-of-doors. By the light of the stars the non-essentials of life are seen in their true proportions. There are so many things which have only a commercial value, and even that is uncertain. Why strive for them or worry about them? In nature there is a noble indifference to everything save the attainment of the ideal. Flattery aids not an inch to the growth of a tendril, blame does not take one tint from the sky. In nature is the joy of living, of infinite, eternal life. Her eternity is now, today, this hour. Each of her creatures seeks the largest, fullest, best life possible under given conditions. The wild raspberries on which the catbirds were feeding today would have been just as fine had there been no catbird to eat them or human eye to admire them. Had there been no human ear to delight, the song of the woodthrush would have been just as sweet. The choke-cherries crimsoning in the summer sun, the clusters of the nuts swelling among the leaves of the hickory will strive to attain perfection, whether or no there are human hands to gather them. They live in beauty, simplicity and serenity, all-sufficient in themselves to achieve their ends.

* * * * *

Let me live by the old road among the flowers and the trees, the same old road year after year, yet new with the light of each morning. Shirking not my share of the world's work, let me gather comfort from the cool grasses and the restful shade of the old road, hope and courage from the ever-recurring miracle of the morning and the springtime, inspiration to strive nobly toward a high ideal of perfection. They are talking of improving the old road. They will build pavements on either side, and a trim park in the middle, where strange shrubs from other states will fight for life with the tall, rank weeds which always tag the heels of civilization. Then let me live farther out,—always just beyond the last lamp on the outbound road, like Omar Khayyam in his strip of herbage, where there are no improvements,

Page 14

no conventionalities, where life is as large as the world and where the sweet sanities and intimacies of nature are as fresh and abundant as the dew of the morning. Rather than the pavements, let me see the holes of the tiger-beetles in the dirt of the road, the funnels of the spiders leading down to the roots of the grass and their cobwebs spread like ladies' veils, each holding dozens of round raindrops from the morning shower, as a veil might hold a handful of gleaming jewels. Let me still take note of the coming of the months by the new flower faces which greet me, each taking their proper place in the pageant of the year. Old memories of friends and faces, old joys and hopes and loves flash and fade among the shrubs and the flowers—here we found the orchis, there we gathered the gentians, under this oak the friend now sleeping spoke simply of his faith and hope in a future, sweeter summer, when budding thoughts and aspirations should blossom into fadeless beauty and highest ideals be attained. Let me watch the same birds building the same shapely homes in the old familiar bushes and listen to the old sweet songs, changeless through the years. If the big thistle is rooted out, where shall the lark sparrow build her nest? If the dirt road is paved, how shall the yellow-hammers have their sand-baths in the evening, while the half grown rabbits frisk around them? Sweet the hours spent in living along the old road—let my life be simpler, that I may spend more time in living and less in getting a living. There are so many things deemed essential that really are not necessary at all. One hour of new thought is better than them all. Let the days be long enough for the zest and joy of work, for the companionship of loved ones and friends, for a little time loafing along the old road when the day's work is done. Let me hear the sibilant sounds of the thrashers as they settle to sleep in the thicket. Give me the fragrance of the milkweed at evening. Let me see the sunset glow on the trunks of the trees, the ruby tints lingering on the boulder brought down by the glaciers long ago; the little bats that weave their way beneath the darkening arches of the leafy roof, while the fire-flies are lighting their lamps in the nave of the sylvan sanctuary. When the afterglow has faded and the blur of night has come, give me the old, childlike faith and assurance that tomorrow's sun shall rise again, and that by-and-by, in the same sweet way, there shall break the first bright beams of Earth's Eternal Easter morning.

[Illustration: "*The fragrance of the milkweed at evening*" (p. 54)]

VIII.—BY THE RIVERSIDE IN AUGUST

Page 15

When morning broke, little wisps of mist, like curls of white smoke, were drifting on the surface of the river as it journeyed through the canyon of cliffs and trees, dark as the walls of night, toward the valley where the widening sea of day was slowly changing from gray to rosy gold. Caught in a cove where the water was still these little wisps gathered together and crept in folds up the face of the cliff, as if they fain would climb to the very top where the red cedars ran like a row of battlements, twisting their stunted trunks over the brink and hanging their dark foliage in a fringe eighty feet above the water. But the cliff had for centuries defied all climbers, though it gave footing here and there to a few friendly plants. At its base the starry-rayed leaf-cup shed a heavy scent in the stillness of the moist morning. Higher, at the entrance to a little cave, the aromatic spikenard, with purple stems and big leaves, stood like a sentinel. From crannies in the limestone wall the harebell hung, its last flowers faded, but its foliage still delicately beautiful, like the tresses of some wraith of the river, clinging to the grim old cliff, and waiting, like Andromeda, for a Perseus. Tiny blue-green leaves of the cliff-brake, strung on slender, shining stems, contrasted their delicate grace with the ruggedness of the old cliff. Still higher, where a little more moisture trickled down from the wooded ridge above, the walking fern climbed step by step, patiently pausing to take new footings by sending out roots from the end of each long, pointed leaf. Near the top of the cliff, where the red cedars gave some shade, little communities of bulb-bearing ferns and of polypody displayed their exquisite fronds, as welcome in a world of beauty as smiles on a mother's face. Mosses and lichens grew here and there, staining the face of the old cliff gray, green and yellow. These tiny ferns and mosses, each drawing the sort of sustenance it needed from the layers of the limestone, seemed greater than the mountain of rock. Imposing and spectacular, yet the rock was dead,—the mausoleum for countless forms of the old life that ceased to be in ages long forgotten. These fairy forms that sprang from it were the beginnings of the new life, the better era, the cycle of the future, living, breathing, almost sentient things, transforming the stubborn stone into beauty of color and form, into faith that moves mountains and hope that makes this hour the center of all eternity. For them the river had been patiently working through the centuries, scoring its channel just a little deeper, cutting down ever so little each year the face of the cliff. Eternity stretched backward to the time when the little stream running between the thin edges of the melting ice sheets at the top of the high plateau first began to cut the channel and scarp this mighty cliff; still backward through untold ages to the time when the lowest layer of limestone in the cliff was only soft

Page 16

sediment on the shore of a summer sea. Eternity stretched forward, also, to the time when this perpendicular wall shall have been worn to a gentle slope, clad with luxuriant verdure, and adorned, perchance, with fairer flowers than any which earth now knows; still forward through other untold ages to the time when all earth's fires shall have cooled; when wind, rain, storm and flood, shall have carried even the slope to the sea and made this planet a plain like Mars. Now is the golden age; this hour is the center of eternity.

* * * * *

Red tints of the sunrise brightened into yellow, then followed the white light of an August day. Now the morning mist has gone; woods, fields and river lie silent in the hot, bright, apathetic morning. Peace reigns over the smiling fields where Plenty pours from her golden horn. Here, on the ridge at the top of the cliff, the woods stretch back half a mile to meet the prairie. Straight down from the red cedars on the brink of the rock the river softly eddies round a huge boulder,—the remnant of some cliff tragedy countless years ago. In the rent of the rock from which it fell a turkey-buzzard often sits and spreads her huge wings as the boats glide by. Storms have scalloped pockets in the softer strata; in them still hang the phoebe's nests, which were filled with young birds in June. Here and there a swallow's hole may be seen in the rock; earlier in the season the young birds often peeped out from these holes as if wishing for strength to come speedily to their wings. Across the river there is a wide beach where the low water makes ripple-marks in the sand. Narrow leaves of sand-bar willows fringe the shore, and back of these are the shining leaves of the oaks. Down the river there are glimpses of the fields,—yellow stubble where the grain has been cut, serried ranks of the green and tan where the far-flung guidons of the tasselled corn stretch away up the slope like a mighty army to demolish the cloud-castles of refuge on the far horizon where the mists fled for safety from the pursuing rays of the sun. Overhead the oak-leaves are motionless, like the comforting, brooding wings of Peace. It is a time for rest and quiet joy in the beauty and the fulness of the year. Now, in the grateful shade of some friendly old oak, is the time to "loaf and invite my soul."

[Illustration: "*Grateful shade of some friendly old oak*" (p. 63)]

[Illustration: "*Fat from A summer's feeding*" (p. 63)]

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Happy is the man who has made a companion of some fine old tree standing near his home, type of the tree which he loved in his boyhood, perchance the very same huge white oak. He learns to go to it as he would to his friend, to let the old tree share his sorrows and his joys. Others may be heedless of its charm, ignorant of its power to

help, but for him it always has a welcome and a ministry of beauty. He learns to visit it often, to talk to it in his thoughts. Some dreamy summer morning he muses on its history, its service to mankind. The old tree seems to bend its branches down to listen as he says:

Page 17

"I know you, old tree, and I love you. You belong to one of the first and finest families. The remains of your ancestors have been found in the eocene and miocene rocks, away, way north of your home at the present time. They grew in beauty long before man's face was seen upon the earth. The whole of civilization has rested beneath your ancestral shade. Long before the Eternal City was founded your ancestors adorned the seven hills and beautified the grass beneath with the flickering shadows cast by their sunlit leaves. Some of them which gave shade to the first habitations in the proud city that from her throne of beauty ruled the world were still fine and flourishing centuries later when Pliny sat beneath them in studious contemplation. Others of your ancestors, old tree, formed the sacred grove of Dodona, where the oracles spake to minds as yet in darkness. They were accounted fit to compare in might and majesty with Jove himself, and some of them stood like sturdy sentinels around his Roman temple. The civic crown which adorned the brows of Roman heroes as a reward for great deeds done, was made of green leaves from their branches. In the shadow of your ancestors Pan played his pipes, Theocritus sat and listened to the everlasting laughter of the summer sea and his shepherds and goatherds reclined to engage in their friendly contests of song. Vergil in his eclogues paid tribute to their beauty and grandeur. They guarded the Druids' sacred fire and some of them are living yet which gave shelter to the victorious legions of William the Conqueror when he crossed the channel more than two thousand years ago. Hearts of oak made the ships which helped a nation fight her way to the supremacy of the sea and also the caravels which bore an intrepid discoverer across the weary waste of waters to the threshold of the new home for all those seeking life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Some of your ancestors made the log cabins to shelter the band of pioneers led by the pious Hooker into the valley of the Connecticut and another preserved the precious charter until the storm of tyranny had passed. It is your family, old tree, which has lent itself willingly to the service of man, in the comfort and stability of his home and in the panels and carvings which adorn the great cathedrals he has built for the worship of his Creator and the enrichment of his own soul."

Still the old tree listens. The heart warms toward it as memory speaks of its companionship through the years:

"And I have watched you, old tree, in storm and in sunshine; in the early winter when the soft snow stuck fast to your rugged old trunk and your branches and twigs and made you a picture of purity; and in the later winter when the fierce storms wrestled in vain with your sinewy limbs. While the other trees of the forest were tossing hither and thither, bent and broken by the blast, you stood in calm poise and dignity, nodding and swaying towards me as if

Page 18

to show me how to withstand adversity. And I have watched your pendulous blossoms daily grow more beautiful among the miracles of early May when the sunshine of the flower-spangled days made you a vision of tender green and gold. I have seen your tiny leaves creep out of their protecting bud-scales in the springtime, their upper surfaces touched with a pink more lovely than that on the cheek of a child, while below they were clothed with a silvery softness more delicately fair than the coverlid in the cradle of a king. I have watched them develop into full-grown leaves with lobes as rounded and finely formed as the tips of ladies' fingers and I have noted how well the mass of your foliage has protected your feathered friends and their naked nestlings from the peltings of the hail, the drenchings of the rain and the scorching of the summer sun. I have gloried in the grateful shade you gave alike to happy children in their play and to tired parents weary and worn with the work and the worry of the world; and it was then, old tree, that you taught me to be sympathetic and hospitable. And I have watched your fruit ripen and fall, to be eagerly seized by the wild folk of the woodland and stored, some of it in the holes of your own trunk, for use during the long winter. You taught me to be generous and they gave me lessons in forethought and frugality. Later in the autumn I have watched your green leaves take on a wondrous wine-red beauty, as the splendor of a soul sometimes shines most vividly in the hour before it is called home; and they taught me not to grieve or to murmur because death must come to us all. In the winter I have seen the squirrel digging beneath the snow to find the acorns he had planted in the fall. He didn't find them all; some of them came up in the springtime as tiny trees and spoke to me of the life that knows no end."

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Now a woodchuck, fat from a summer's feeding, climbs heavily to a tree stump and seats himself to pass the morning in his favorite avocation of doing nothing. He worked during the night or the very early morning, for fresh dirt lay at the entrance to his hole. Evidently he had been enlarging it for the winter. Like a Plato at his philosophies he sits now, slowly moving his head from side to side, as if steeping his senses in the beauty of the world around him so that all the dreams of his long winter sleep shall be pleasant. A persistent fly, a slap, and the woodchuck hears. He turns that dark gray, solemn looking face, and asks mutely, reproachfully, perhaps resentfully, why his reverie has been disturbed. Then he hastily scurries to his burrow and he will not again appear though I sit here all day.

[Illustration: "*He turns that solemn face*" (p. 71)]

Page 19

From a hole in the side of a fallen log the chipmunk peeps warily, comes out quickly, but whisks back again in fancied fright. Soon he returns and sits on the log awhile, barking his bird-like “chip, chip,” and flirting his tail with each note. Then he sets about gathering the old oak leaves which were piled near the log by the winds last March and have lain undisturbed through the summer. Grabbing two or three in his mouth, he pushes them into his pouches with his paws and is gone into his hole like a flash. The hole in the log is the entrance to the long passageway which goes down perpendicularly for three feet, and then gradually ascends, until at a distance of eight feet it is about a foot below the surface of the ground. Here the chipmunk will pass the cold days of winter, snugly sleeping in his leafy bed which he is now preparing, with a store of food nearby to use in wakeful spells of warm weather and in the lean days next spring after he has fairly roused himself from lethargy. For half an hour he comes and goes, carrying two or three, even four leaves at a time. Then he comes a little farther away from the log, suddenly looks up and sees me sitting. He stops short, breathes quickly, his little sides tremble; I take out an old envelope and write his description, like this:

“Size, about half way between a mouse and a rat, five or six inches long, with a tail perhaps five inches more, about as big around as a man's thumb, bushy, but of even size the whole length, top of head dark gray, yellowish circles about the shining black eyes; short, erect ears; light gray underneath, with whitish legs; a narrow black stripe down the middle of the back, then on either side, a stripe of reddish gray; then a stripe of black, next a stripe of yellow, then black again and after that, reddish fox color down to the whitish under-parts.”

At length the chipmunk makes a dash for the thicket ten feet away and his “chip, chip,” rings out excitedly as he reaches the friendly shelter.

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The chipmunk is not the only woods creature preparing for winter during the hottest days of August. For more than a week the flying squirrel has been making the small mossy cup acorns rain down on the roof of the bungalow. He begins on them when they are scarcely acorns, merely green cups with a dot at the top. But he knows. He bites them in two, and deftly extracts the acorn, which is in the milky state, scarcely as large as a pea. He does it in the darkness, but with amazing rapidity. Speeding from twig to twig, from one cluster of acorns to another, he cuts the cups in two and extracts the meat so fast that the pieces rain down on the roof. When he is working at top speed, he will probably average twenty acorns a minute. In the morning the roof of the porch is covered with pieces of the husks.

Page 20

For half an hour after sunset he keeps up this fast speed. Apparently he is getting supper after his long sleep through the day. At the end of half an hour he begins to work more leisurely. The pieces fall on the roof every now and then. Possibly he is taking the sweetmeats to his hole, high up in a tree. Through the night there is the intermittent sound of his labor. Sometimes, towards morning, he drops in for a visit,—literally drops in, by way of the chimney and the open fireplace. He knows no fear. Going to the kitchen, he helps himself to the doughnut left on the table for him. If it is a whole one, he nibbles all around it. If only half a one he carries it away. You may close the kitchen door and catch him with your bare hands. He will neither squeal nor bite. But he makes a poor pet, because he sleeps in the daytime and works in the darkness. He strongly dislikes the light. If put into a box he backs up into the darkest corner, brings his beautiful flat tail between his four legs and up over his nose and his eyes. Rolled up lengthwise in this ball he spends the day; but when evening comes he is active enough. If kept for any length of time he makes a very docile pet and will beg permission to sleep in your pocket. But it is better to give him his freedom, and see him scamper up one tree and “fly” to another. As he springs he spreads out the whitish membranes along each side, holds his flat tail rigid, quivering. Thus he goes down, parachute fashion, on an inclined plane. Just before he gets to the tree trunk which is his objective point, he makes momentum aid his muscles in the accomplishment of an upward curve.

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Crickets and katydids droned and fiddled all night, and when the katydids quit at daybreak, other grasshoppers and cicadas were ready to take their places in the screechy orchestra. Night and day they shrill their ceaseless music. It is all masculine love music, as much an expression of their tender feelings towards listening maidens, as the old troubadour songs to fair ladies or as the exquisite song of the rose-breasted grosbeak is to his brown-garbed spouse in May and June. Late in July it began with the short rasps and screeches of tiny hoppers flitting in the grass; the katydid began to tune up on the evening of July 29. Then the long-legged conductor waved his baton and the orchestra was off. It started moderato, but quickly increased to an allegro, and sometimes it is almost presto. For the first two weeks in August new fiddlers were constantly being added, and now there are enough to fill every band stand all through the woods. The noise at night is almost ear-splitting. The old preacher was right about it. There are times when the grasshopper is a burden. At the hour of sunset the cicada winds his rattle most joyously, subsiding into silence as darkness comes and making way for the katydid.

Page 21

The screechy orchestra is a poor substitute for the grand birds' concerts of June and July. For the birds, August is a month of silence. Except for an occasional solo, nearly all the birds are silent, moulting and moping in the thickets. If you steal into the thicket you may find the thrushes and the thrashers feeding on the ground. Once in a while one of them shows himself in the morning or the evening, but not often. Nesting done, the brown thrasher ceased his long and brilliant solos from the treetops after the first week of July. Next week the catbird's song was heard for the last time. Because the first nest of the wood thrush was robbed by the blue-jays, a second nest was built. This family was safely reared, and the wood thrush sang until the third week in July, when one clear sunset night, the sky all aglow with banners of golden red, he sang his farewell solo. For seven weeks the Maryland yellow throat sang just at the turn of the old woods road, where his mate had her nest in a low bush. As the babies waxed large his song waned, and he was not heard during the last week in July, nor since. Still the dickcissel, the lark sparrow and the indigo bunting continued their trio. Evidently their babies were somewhere over in the field nearby, a field that was corn last year, and now is grown up thickly with smartweed. August came with a rush of the mercury above the ninety mark, and there it has stayed. A week of it was enough for this trio. They ceased their concert work, but now and then the lark sparrow pipes up a feeble imitation of his sweet notes in July. Like the song sparrow, he cannot wholly refrain from expressing his satisfaction in being alive. Many men and women are just like that. The vireos also ceased singing at the end of the first week in August, but sometimes the red-eye gives a little preachment from his leafy pulpits in the woods. Latest among the singers are the chewinks, the wood pewees, the field sparrows, and, of course, the goldfinches and the cuckoos. The young chewinks left their nests in the pasture on the third, and the chewink's feelings expressed themselves in song for two weeks after that. He out-sang the field sparrows, whose young were hatched August third, and left their nest on the twelfth. Apparently the field sparrow stopped singing and went to work providing for his family of three. But the chewink was not to be sobered so quickly. Why not sing with the work? The days are long enough, happy enough, for both. Even now he gives occasional bursts of song. Evidently this is the theory of the tanager also, for he sang all through July, and here in mid-August his trumpet tones occasionally ring through the leafy silences of the woods. The young wood pewees which left their nests on the eleventh are now able to shift for themselves; but the parents have much the same song as they had when the three eggs lay in the nest, saddled to the burr-oak bough. Still, through the peaceful morning air comes the loud, clear,

Page 22

cheery call of the Bob White—a note that has in it health and vigor for the healing of many a tired heart. As for the cuckoo, well, his mate is guarding those bluish-green eggs in the apology for a nest built in the lower branches of a young black-oak; they will not be hatched until the very last of the month. He does his best to be cheerful and to make a joyful sound. “Kut-Kut-Kut,” and “Kow-Kow-Kow”—you may often hear the latter sound in the middle of the night. Does he try to let his lady dear know that he is near her through the darkness, or is he happily singing in his dreams?

Perched on a mullen spike, a goldfinch is singing to his mate, whose nest is in a sapling not far away. His jet black wings fold over his yellow back, shaping it into a pointed shield of gold. He is so happy and so fond that he can not bear long to remain out of her sight. Now he sings a tender serenade, then his joy rises to ecstasy. He takes wings and floats up and down the imaginary waves, circling higher and higher, his sweet notes growing more rapturous until finally they reach their climax as he goes abruptly skyward. Then his fluttering wings close, and he drops from a height of perhaps forty or fifty feet, to alight again on his original perch and resume his tender serenade, singing now in a sweet, dreamy way, sounding just like a ripple of moonlit water looks. This love-song of the goldfinch is the climax of the summer’s bird-song. If there were none other, the summer would be worth while.

Dreamily sitting on a bare twig, the wood pewee is content. She has raised her family, they are now able to get their own food. Though she is worn and wasted since the spring, and may easily be told from her husband, because he is handsome and well-groomed, yet is she content to sit and wait for the food to come her way. Now she circles from her perch and returns. Watching her catch an insect on the way, I hear the sharp snap of her bill, as if two pebbles had been smartly struck together.

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Fanning the air with gauzy wings, the honey bee comes for a feast on the flowers of the figwort. Visiting every open blossom, he loads up with the honey and departs in a line for his hive. Bye-and-bye a humble-bee wanders along, quickly finding that another has drained the blossoms of their sweets. He passes on undismayed; there are more flowers. Over by the wire fence the tick-trefoil, desmodium, is in its glory. Its lower petal stands out like a doorstep, and on it the humble-bee alights. Two little yellow spots, bordered with deep red, show him where lies the nectar. Here he thrusts his head, forcing open the wing petals from the standard. Instantly the keel snaps down as if a steel spring had been released. The bee is dusted with pollen, which he carries with him to fertilize another flower. How did the flower learn to fashion that mechanism, to construct those highly colored nectar-guides?

Page 23

How many centuries of accumulated intelligence or instinct,—call it what the scientists please,—are there behind that action of the bee, thrusting his head just where those nectar-guides are placed? Is the bee more sentient than the flower? Or, is the flower which provided the nectar and placed the nectar-guides just at the right place on the bright blossoms, as special allurements for the senses of the bee, the more to be admired for its intelligence? One by one the bee opens the flowers, which were so fresh and beautiful at sunrise. When he goes to his nest in the grass at evening, they will all have been drained of their nectar, and the petals will be wilted by the sun. But they have achieved their object, the ovules have been fertilized. Tomorrow morning there will be many bright, new blossoms, their nectar crying to the bees, like the voice in Omar Khayyam's tavern to those outside the door:

*"When all the temple is prepared within,
Why lags the drowsy worshiper outside?"*

Now there comes sidling, gliding along the barbed wire fence, the Baltimore oriole, always a charming fellow because of his flaming plumage, which has won for him the name of the golden robin and firebird. He walks along the wire fence in a gliding, one-leg-at-a-time fashion, as he often does on the twig of a tree. His head is down, he is on the lookout for caterpillars. Now he reaches the tick-trefoil, and nips out some stamens from its purple blossoms, which he eats with relish.

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The work of the year will soon be done. Most of the trees have completed the growth for the year and nothing remains but to complete the filling of the buds which already have formed for next year. Pull down a twig of the white-oak and you find a cluster of terminal buds at the end, marking the close of this year's growth, each of them containing the nucleus of next year's life. In the axils of the leaves on the elm are the little jeweled buds which will be brown and dull all winter, but will shine like garnets when the springtime comes. The fat, green buds on the linden are yellowing now, and next they are to be tinted into the ruby red which is so attractive in the winter months when contrasted with the snow.

As the sun nears the zenith the heat waves on the ridges, and across the cornfields seem to have a rhythmic motion, as if they are manifestations of the great throbbing pulse-beat of nature, working at almost feverish haste to ripen her fruits and prepare for the winter in the few weeks of summer that yet remain. And now the sunshine has a new and deeper meaning. If we have ever complained of it, we hasten to pray pardon. Not only in the cornfields, where the milky ears are fast filling, but all over upland and lowland, in woods and fields and meadows, Nature is busy making and storing starch and sugar, protein and albumen, that the earth and all that therein is

Page 24

may have cause to rejoice in the fullness of the year. Above the ground she stores it in drupe and pome and berry, nut and nutlet and achene, and below the ground in rootstock and rhizome, corm and tuber, pumping them full with strokes quick and strong in these grand climacteric days of the summer. All the water which seemed so useless in April, all the rain which seemed so superfluous and so dreary in May and June, has been used. Not a drop of it was wasted. Its office was to feed life, to dissolve the substances in the rocks and the soils which the plants needed, to be mixed with the sunshine in the manufacture of food for the present and for the future. Nor is the heat nor the light wasted. Both are stored in the trunks of the trees, and when in the winter the back log sends out its steady heat and the foresticks their cheerful blaze, the old tree will give back, measure for measure, the light and heat it has stored through the years. Let us rejoice in the fervent heat and the grand work of the August days. So a man works as he approaches his ideals. Feebly at first he begins. Winds of adversity buffet him, cold disdain would freeze his ambition, hot scorn would shrivel his soul. Still he perseveres, striving towards his ideal, firmly rooted in faith and his heart ever open for the beauty and the sunshine of the world. In periods of storm and cloud, his heart, like the sun, makes its own warmth and splendor, knowing that the season of its strength shall come. When he seems to be growing nearer his ideal his fervor is at August heat; for him there is no burden in the heat of the day; tirelessly, joyously, he strives, achieves, attains. Thus he does his share of the work of the world and adds his mite to the heritage of its future.

* * * * *

The plants of the woodlands seem strangely unfamiliar since the springtime. If you have not called upon them during these months that have fled so swiftly you will almost feel the need of being introduced to them again. Some of them, such as the Dutchman's breeches and the bluebell, have gone, like the beautiful children who died when life was young. Others have grown away from you, like the children you used to know in the days gone by, so strangely altered now. The little uvularia, whose leaves were so soft and silky in May and whose blossom drooped so prettily, like a golden bell, is tall, and branched now, and its leaves are stiff and papery. Its curious, triangular, leathery pods have lifted their lids at the top and discharged their bony seeds. The blood-root, the hepatica, and the wild ginger are showing big and healthy leaves, but the few lady slippers, here and there, have faded almost beyond recognition.

Page 25

When the summer shower patters down among the leaves the music of the insect orchestra ceases and the performers shield their instruments with their wings. It passes and gleams of sunshine make jewels of the raindrops. Then a little breeze brings the aroma of the blossoming bergamot, wild mint, basil and catnip, filling the air with a spicy fragrance. The insects tune up; soon the orchestra is at it again. White cumulus clouds appear, floating lazily in the azure, reflected by the river below. They chase the sunlight across the amber stubble of the oat-fields and weave huge pictures which flash and fade among the swaying tassels of the corn.

[Illustration: "*In placid ponds*" (p. 92)]

And oh, the color-splendor of these August days! Here at the top of the cliff, the orange-flowered milkweed still flames in beauty, mingled with the pink and lavender bergamot and the varied yellows of the sunflowers and the rosin weeds. Down nearer the water's edge where the shelves of the cliff are layered with soil, the virgin's bower twines clusters of creamy white. On the grassy shore where the river begins to leave the rocks the brilliant blue lobelia is breaking into blossom, contrasted with the bright lemon yellow of the helenium. Masses of pink light up shady places where the false dragonhead grows, and the jewel weeds are thickly hung with pendant blossoms of orange and pale yellow. The river winds along the low shores and reedy shallows, sometimes partly losing itself in placid ponds, gay with the crimson and green and blue of the dragon-flies, and fringed by dark green reeds and rushes from which Pan might well have made his pipes to charm the gods, and the Naiads of the sacred fount. Onward it goes, now passing by a sloping bank which the gray-leaved golden rod has covered with a wealth of golden glory; for this low-growing golden rod which blossoms so early, is the most brilliantly and richly golden of them all.

[Illustration: "*Still the river beckons onward*" (p. 93)]

Great fluffy masses of pink purple at the top of large-leaved stems are the blossoms of the Joe Pye Weed, and smaller clusters of royal purple in the grassy places are the efflorescence of the iron weed. A stretch of grassy ground, which slopes down to the river's brink, is gemmed with the thick purple clusters of the milkwort, which shines among the grass as the early blossoms of the clover used to do when the summer was young. Here and there the little bag-like blossoms of the gerardia, or foxglove, are opening among the stems of the fading grass, and the white blossoms of the marsh bellflower, the midget member of the campanula family, are apparently as fresh and numerous as they were in early July. Water horehound has whitish whorls of tiny blossoms and prettily cut leaves, which are as interesting as the flowers. And still the river beckons onward, murmuring that

Page 26

the quest of the flower-lover is not yet done and that the prize awaits the victor who presses on to the swamp around the bend where the birches hang drooping branches over quiet, fish-full pools. The prize is worth the extra half-mile. It is the gorgeous flower of late summer, a fit symbol of August, the queen blossom of a queenly month, the brilliant red lobelia, or cardinal flower. There is no flower in the year so full of vivid color. Sometimes, but only very rarely, the purple torches of the exquisite little fringed orchis (*habenaria psychodes*) lights up a swampy place beneath the trees and sheds its delicate fragrance as a welcome to the bees.

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The life of an August day, like all life, comes too quickly to a close. In the morning of a day, of a summer, or of a life, there seems so much ahead; so many friends to help and cheer, so much beauty to behold, so many pleasant roads to roam, so much to accomplish, and so many treasures to gather by the way. But when the days are growing shorter and the twilight falls, perhaps it is enough if we can feel that we have at the best but faithful failures; perhaps enough if we have forgotten the dust and the rocks and the mire, and have treasured only the memories of the beauty and the music and the joy which was ours by the way; surely enough if we can look forward happily and peacefully to the west where

The sky is aglow with colors untold, With a triumph of crimson and opal and gold, And wavering curtains woven of fire Are hung o'er the portals of Day's desire. The sun goes to rest in his western halls And over the world, the twilight falls.

And then the glory fades to gray and beautiful Venus smiles at us just over the tops of the trees. Little is heard save the occasional note of the whip-poor-will and the constant reminder from the katydid that it is not far to frost. But the river ripples softly around the rocks and a cool air stirs in the trees above, exorcising all mournful spirits. The harvest moon is rising and the white light lies sleeping, dreaming, on trees and cliff and river. On such a night pleading Pan wooed his coy nymph with the promise:

*And then I'll tell you tales that no one knows
Of what the trees talk in the summer nights;
When far above you hear them murmuring,
As they sway whispering to the lifting breeze.*

IX.—THE PASSING OF SUMMER

When the wild plums ripen in the thicket by the creek and the grapes are purpling in the kisses of the sun; when even the sunlight itself grows mellow and the landscape wears

a dreamy haze, colored like the bloom on a plum, as if the year, too, had reached perfect ripeness; then it is mid-September and Iowa begins a season of loveliness which shall hardly be excelled anywhere on earth.

Page 27

Young birds imitate the spring songs of their parents in a faint, wistful, reminiscent way, some of those hatched early in the year rising almost to full song, as in the case of the meadow larks whose music rings through the meadows and makes the balmy afternoons seem like those of early May. The wild strawberry blossoms again; the violet and some of the other spring flowers. But the signs of the passing of the summer are everywhere in evidence. Dense, white morning mists—the September mists—lie in the valleys and yield but slowly to the shafts of the rising sun. Flocks of feathered voyagers are shaping their course toward the south. Gold and crimson leaves grow more numerous along the lanes and in the woods. Antares, Altair and Vega, with the summer constellations, are passing farther towards the west, while before bedtime Fomalhaut may be seen at the mouth of the Southern Fish in the southeast and the creamy white Capella is leading up Auriga in the northeast. Between them, just over the eastern rim of the world, appear the Pleiades, their “sweet influences” in keeping with the season. The summer is passing, but not in sadness. Some of the greatest of its glories are reserved for these last days.

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Now the cicada, forgetting to give his winding salute at sundown, has almost dropped out of the insect orchestra and the katydid, too, is heard less often. The rest of the screeching musicians vary the volume and the speed of their music in approximate ratio to the temperature. In the warm evening they saw and rub away at presto time as if they were determined to get to the end of the selection before the curtain goes up for the moonlight scene; but they slacken to moderato when the nights grow cooler, slower, always slower, and fainter as the chill air creeps through the woods. When the north wind filters coldly through the trees their music thins and dims till it sounds pathetic as the tick of a tall clock in a lonely house at night. But it warms up again with the sunshine next day, keeping time and tune with the varying moods of the final days of the summer. When a dreamy, hazy day is followed by a mellow night and little patches of white moonlight lie dreaming beneath the trees, the crickets have a lullaby that comes in rhythmic beats, as if they watched the moonlight breathe and rocked the world to sleep.

* * * * *

Comforting and soothing as the touch of a loved hand on a fevered brow come the first cooling breezes of September after the fierce white heat of August. Sweeter than music is the sound of the wind, as it passes through the woods, welcomed by millions of waving branches and dancing leaves. It brings the call of the quail, the scream of the jay, the bark of the squirrel, the crack of the hunter’s gun, the first notes of the returning bluebirds, the clean, keen scent of the earth after rain, the courage and joy of life, motion, action. Seen from the top of a cliff the acres of foliage spread out in the creek valley beneath has a motion suggesting the waves of the sea, now flowing in green billows before the wind, now whipped into spray at the shore of the creek where the willows show the white sides of their leaves.

Page 28

In the fields the far-flung banners of the corn take on ripening tints and begin to rustle drily in the breeze. Golden ears, wrapped in tobacco-brown silk, are pushing from tanned and purplish husks. Newly-plowed fields were made possible by the rains which started the grass growing in the stubble, changing the color from amber to emerald and wrought a miracle of verdure in the pastures which August had baked brown. Here and there the aftermath of red clover has developed a field of new blossoms,—a little lake of pink where sunshine plays with shadow and sturdy humble bees spend the days in ecstasy.

* * * * *

Summer puts on her last bright robes for the final floral review before she is borne by the birds down the valley to set up her court in the southland. Tall and soldierly, this last gay army of the flowers passes in review before her. Blazing stars in pink and purple, tall and picturesque, with long rows of brilliant buttons; regiments of asters in blue and white and purple; rattle-snake root with big and quaintly slashed leaves and hundreds of tassels in delicate shades of lilac, purple and white; swamp sunflowers in dazzling yellow, camped in millions along the creek bottom to make it more glorious than the historical pageant of the Field of the Cloth of Gold; plummy battalions of golden-rod, marshalled by the sun along every country lane; companies of tall, saw-leaved sunflowers with golden petals and darker disks, deployed along the fences and seen at their best in the twilight when they look like friendly faces with beaming eyes; as I write them so they march across the land and bow farewell to summer. There is no floral spectacle in all the land so fine as this march of the composites over the Iowa prairies and fields in September. That is the judgment of those who have travelled and observed. In the swamps and along the ditches the blue lobelias flourish and the companies of blue gentians are bringing up the rear to end the floral review, begging the summer to wait until they pass by.

The little creek near which I live rises in a little swale between two rolling ridges of the pasture. When it leaves the pasture only a narrow box culvert is necessary to take it across the road, but before it reaches the river, twenty miles away, a double-spanned bridge is required to carry the road over it. In the pasture where it rises it fails to furnish enough water for the cattle, but half way along its course it sometimes washes out bridges in the springtime and farther down it often floods the lowlands. Slipping silently among the feet of the long grasses in the meadows it is scarcely seen at first; but by-and-by it attains the dignity of a stream, winding through meadows and bordering orchards and grain-fields. Now the willows begin to mark its course, then elms and oaks and walnuts with little thickets of paniced dogwood and wild plum, where the wild grape and the bittersweet display their fruit and the wild duck sometimes makes her nest.

Page 29

[Illustration: "*Pausing in each deep pool to cool and refresh itself*" (p. 109)]

Sometimes the creek almost sinks from sight in a bed of hot sand; it leaves only a narrow runlet of water idling along the foot of the high bank and pausing in each deep pool at the feet of the overhanging trees to cool and refresh itself for its onward journey. To these quiet pools goes the fisherman with his minnow seine and a stick. He knows that in the water among the roots of the old tree lie shiners and soap minnows, creek chubs and soft-shelled "crawdads," the kind that make good bait for the black bass down in the river. He pokes around vigorously with his stick and sends them scurrying into his short seine. Hither also go the school-boy fishermen, with a willow pole and one gallus apiece, seeking to entice the patriarchal chub, the shiner and the stone-roller. From this point down, the young anglers are strung along the banks. Some try their luck for sunfish by the piles of loose rock and boulders, and some would tempt the bullheads from siestas in the mud.

Above the mill-dam the water backs up to form a peaceful pond which mirrors the trees and the rushes and cat-tails above it and sleeps beneath the thicket of willows where the redwings flock in the evenings. Broad leaves of the arrow-head and pickerel-weed give shelter to the coot, bobbing her head and neck as she makes nervous journeys through the water, sometimes scratching a long streak across its mirror-like surface as she uses both feet and wings in her haste to escape from the lone pedestrian. At sundown the sandhill crane may sometimes be surprised, standing like a silhouette by the shore of a grassy island. The awkward, wary bittern and the still more vigilant least bittern are familiar residents here.

Below the dam the creek winds at will through a peaceful valley, appropriating to itself an ever widening stretch from the farm lands. Sometimes it hastens down a pebbly speedway, then slackens its pace and wanders off from its course until suddenly it seems to grow alarmed, whips around a bend and comes hurrying back. Sometimes its level flood-plain is a quarter mile wide, bounded on either side by steep timbered hills which stretch on and on down the valley until the sky receives them in a glory of blue haze. Sometimes the creek has cut its way straight down the face of a high rock cliff on one side, while on the other side is a level meadow with bushy-margined ponds. In places the water of the creek lies asleep in a dream of sunshine, but further on it ripples and gurgles over a bouldered bed, walled in by rocky slopes. These are kept moist by water trickling down from hidden springs among the roots of the shrubs and vines, ferns and mosses which soften the grim limestone into beauty of form and color.

[Illustration: "*Lies asleep in A dream of sunshine*" (p. 111)]

Page 30

In the cool days of September, when walking is a fine art, I love to accompany the lower portion of the old creek down to the river, following the little path made by farmer boys and fishermen. The two posts at the fence by the roadside, set just far enough apart for a man to squeeze himself through, are the gates to a land elysian. When I pass through them I am a thousand miles from the city with its toil and pain, its strife and sorrow. Worldly cares drop from my back as I stand upon the brink of this creek and watch the water spreading itself out over the white sand. Time and distance lose their force as factors in my life. I have found and entered the lost lands of Theocritus. Beneath this black ash, touched here and there with the purple wistfulness of the passing year, Pan might have sat to play his pipes, the Cyclops might have pleaded with the graceful Galatea. This haze which hangs over the white oak grove, for aught I know, may be the incense from Druid fires. Along this valley Chaucer's Immortals may have gone a pilgriming, and in this bosky wood Robin Hood may have trained his band. The legend that from this cliff an Indian lover on his favorite pony once leaped to the creek a hundred feet below and a mighty funeral ceremony was held at the Indian mound a little farther down the valley seems to be attested both by the cliff and the mound. Before I have gone very far I am unconcernedly conscious that I have not the slightest idea in which direction lies the nearest road home, nor how far I have come. But I know that somewhere down the lavender-veiled valley the creek and myself shall reach the river at last and all will be well. There are so many beautiful things to see on the way that I would not hasten if I could. Life and the future is much like that.

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There is a pleasant constancy in the companionship of a creek. It is always at home when I call, always seems to wear a smile of welcome, always has something new to offer in the way of entertainment. And it is changeless through the years. If I were to return some September afternoon after an absence of half a lifetime I should expect to see a green heron fly up the creek when I reached this particular bend and to find the kingfisher in his accustomed place on the bare branch of this patriarchal oak. At the next bend, where the current has cut the bank straight down I should look for the rows of holes made by the little colony of bank swallows. I should steal around the sharp bend by the old willow to see a little sandpiper on the boulder in mid-stream as of old. On a certain high grassy knoll I should find the woodchuck sunning himself and he would run towards his same old hole beneath the basswood tree, just as he does today. On the swampy edge of the stream I should find the perennial blossoms of this same corymbed rattle-snake root and its interesting spear-shaped leaves reflected in the water. From

Page 31

the dry bank just at the end of this ledge of rock my nostrils would catch the resinous odor of the creamy-flowered kuhnian and a more subtle aroma from the pearly-blossomed everlasting. The horse in the pasture would again come up and rub his nose in my hand and the cattle beneath the trees would make the same picture as in the days of long ago. Civilization can hardly spoil the creek. The spring freshets obliterate attempts at road-making and the steep hills protect it from encroachment and preserve its independence and wild beauty.

[Illustration: "*Cattle beneath the trees would make the same picture*" (p. 116)]

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It is worth while to spend a little time with the friendly golden-rod which spreads all over upland and lowland almost as generous as the sunshine. To many of us one stalk of golden-rod looks much like another, but a very little study will readily enable us to distinguish between the different species and will add wonderfully to its interest and charm. There is the tall, smooth stemmed golden-rod, with saw toothed leaves, except near the base and ample pyramids of medium-sized clusters of blossoms; this is the *solidago serotina*, or late golden-rod. A similar golden-rod, but with hairy stems and smaller flower clusters is the *solidago Canadensis* or Canada golden-rod. Both these grow in the bottoms anywhere near the creek. Along the moist clay banks the elm-leaved golden-rod shows its tall stem with the leaves which give the plant its distinctive name, surmounted by several threadlike spreading branches strung with little bits of leaves and clusters of yellow blossoms at the ends, as if the slender, curving, green branches had been dipped in gold dust. On the same slopes may usually be found the zig-zag or broad-leaved golden-rod, with leaves as broad as the palm of a lady's hand and little wand-like clusters of blossoms, several of them from the axil of each leaf. This plant is called the zig-zag golden-rod because its stem often turns first one way and then the other, as if it hadn't made up its mind which way to grow. Higher up on the dry rocky banks is the gray or field golden-rod, whose small leaves are covered with grayish down and whose rather short stem is topped by a flattish pyramid of brilliant yellow flowers. This is one of the early golden-rods, but it lasts well into the fall. Another handsome species which is fairly common is the *solidago rigida*, or hard-leaved golden-rod, whose leaves are thick, rough and fairly broad, the lower ones sometimes a foot long, and whose flower clusters form a broad flat top. Each cluster is very large, containing twenty-five or thirty flowers if you care to pull one to pieces and count them. One stem will have several hundred of these flower clusters and each cluster contains twenty-five flowers on an average, a fine example of Nature's wealth and bounty.

Page 32

Perhaps the most handsome species of all, here in Iowa, is the *solidago speciosa*, or the showy golden-rod, which sometimes grows five, six or seven feet high in rich soil, with a stout, smooth stem and big, smooth leaves, the lower ones broadly oval and sometimes from four to ten inches long and one to four inches wide. The Missouri golden-rod is a slender and dainty species with long, narrow leaves, their margins very rough, as you may tell by drawing your fingers along them.

There are about eighty-five different species of golden-rod in the United States, but the task of naming them all that grow in one locality is not difficult for the nature-lover. The above list is practically all that grow hereabouts. And it is so with the asters. There are about two hundred fifty species of asters, and most of them are found in North America. But usually a dozen or fifteen only are to be found in the average locality. Here, among others, may be found the beautiful aster *Novae-Anglia*, or New England aster with blue or rose-colored rays and a yellow center, the blossoms fluffy and large, often fully two inches across. In some parts of the east it is called "Farewell to Summer," but it may usually be found in the latter part of August. This year it was in full bloom as early as August 21. Another beautiful aster to be found on prairies and dry banks is the aster *sericeus*, or silvery aster, with silvery-white silky leaves and large, violet blue heads, the rays sometimes two-thirds of an inch long. One of the earliest and most common of the asters is the aster *sagittifolius*, or arrow-leaved aster, with white or pale blue flowers, and its companion, the heart-leaved aster. More beautiful is the lovely smooth or blue aster, the aster *laevis*, with clasping, oblong tapering leaves and sky-blue heads, sometimes violet, fully an inch across. The aster *multiflorus*, or dense flowered aster, is bushy with small rigid, crowded leaves, and a multitude of small heads crowded on the spreading branches, the rays generally white like big balls of snow. The aster *salicifolius* has a slender stem much branched above, long and narrow leaves, with violet, violet-purple or rarely white rays, and aster *prenanthoides* or crooked stem aster, may be told by its zigzag stem, its oblong, saw-toothed leaves and its violet rays. Two other beautiful species found hereabouts are the aster *azureus*, which blooms from August until after frost, with a slender but stiff and roughish stem, and many bright violet-blue flowers with short rays; and the aster *Shortii*, or Short's aster, which is found on banks and along the edges of woods and does not usually bloom until September. It has a slender stem and thickish leaves, heart-shaped at the base; its rays number from ten to fifteen and are usually bright blue, sometimes violet blue.

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Page 33

September brings us the first and one of the most beautiful of the gentians, the white gentian. We are accustomed to think of the gentians as brilliantly blue, but the first one to adorn the waste places where the horses could not take the mower, is this white gentian. It is one of the plants which make a magnificent appearance in a tall, thin-stemmed vase, in your library. You need but one and if you chance to find a patch you may take a plant without any compunction of conscience, for they are usually numerous. At the top of the smooth stem are four leaves with heart-shaped bases, gradually tapering to points at the ends. These four pale green leaves cross each other after the manner of a St. Andrew's Cross. Just where the four leaves are thus joined to the stem is a cluster of some six, eight, ten or even more, large, yellowish white, or greenish white blossoms. Perhaps at the next set of leaves, about four inches down the stem, there will be several other blossoms, in the axils. In the swamps and bogs the barrel-shaped blossoms of the closed gentians are growing larger day by day and by the twentieth of the month the fringed gentian, known only to a favored few, here in Iowa, will show the first of its blossoms.

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In these last days of the summer there comes a grateful sense of the ripeness which crowns the year. Nothing in nature has hid its talent in a napkin. Every tree and shrub and herb has something to show in return for the privilege of having lived and worked in a world of beauty. Catbirds on the eve of their departure for the southland are feasting on the red and yellow wild plums, and the crab apples are beginning to give forth a faint fragrance which will grow more pronounced from now until October. The amber clusters of the hop are poured in profusion over the reddening fruit of the hawthorn. Farther on is the brook Eschol where the purple grapes are hanging. The snowy clusters of the sweet elder, which were so beautiful in July and early August, have developed into ample clusters of juicy berries which bring memories of the wine that grandmother used to make. Flocks of robins are feeding greedily on the abundant wild cherries. Thickets of panicked dogwood are feeding stations for other migrants; already the crimson fruit-stalks have been stripped of half their white berries. These native fruits are so many and so varied, they make the walk a constant delight. Each plant is a revelation. Who ever saw for the first time the huge clusters of fruit hanging from the wild spikenard on the face of the cliff and did not thrill with the charm of a great discovery? Each cluster of ruby, winey berries is as large as a hickory-nut and the clusters are aggregated upon stalks so as to resemble huge bunches of grapes. For contrast there are the little bunches of whitish berries on the low-growing false spikenard; they are speckled with reddish and gray dots as if they might be cowbird's eggs in miniature.

Page 34

Jack-in-the-pulpits show club-shaped bunches of scarlet berries here and there among the grasses. On the wooded slopes there are the white fruits of the baneberry on its quaintly-shaped red stalks, the pretty fruit clusters of the moonseed and the smilax. The scattered berries of the green-brier will be black in winter, but their September hue is a bronze green of a delicate shade which artists might envy. It will take another month to ripen the drupes of the black-haw into their blue-black beauty; now they are green on one side and red on the other, like a ripening apple. It's a fine education to know just which fruits you may nibble and which you must not eat. Red-stalked clusters of black berries hang from the vines of the Virginia creeper among leaves just touched with the hectic flame that tells of their passing, all too soon. At the sign of the sumac, tall torches of garnet berries rise. Down the bank, the bittersweet sends trailing arms jeweled with orange-colored pods just opening to display the scarlet arils within. Crimsoning capsules give the burning bush its name; this may well have been the bush at which Moses was directed to take off his sandals because he was treading on holy ground. Large, triangular membranaceous pods hang thickly from the white-lined branches of the bladdernut. Cup-like leaves of the honeysuckle hold bunches of scarlet berries. So on and on the creek leads to new beauties of color and form, new delights for taste and smell. Every plant has some excuse for its being, something of the loveliness and fragrance of the summer stored in its fruits. There is a lesson for the mind and the soul to be gathered with the fruit of these shrubs and vines. Summer still works with tireless energy. She has done with the leaf and the bud and the blossom; all her remaining strength is being spent in filling the fruits before the night of the white death comes.

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Since the first of the month the little catkins have been creeping from the twigs of the hazel, and their tender, spring-like green is quite as interesting as the ripening bunches of nuts. These little catkins will hang short and stiff all winter, but when the ice goes out of the rivers and the first frog croaks in the springtime, they will lengthen, soften and grow yellow with their abundant pollen. Squirrels are busy among the acorns and the hickory nuts; the split husks and shells are thickly strewn beneath the trees. Red-headed woodpeckers are gathering acorns and pushing them behind the flaky bark of the wild cherry for use during the late fall; sometimes a little family of the redheads remains all winter. Chipmunks are carrying acorns to their granaries; they dash into their holes with a squeak as if in derision at your slow-footed manner of walking.

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Page 35

Sumac flames from the fence corners and lights up the country lanes. It is the first of the shrubs to announce in fiery placards the coming spectacle of the passing of the summer. Next is the Virginia creeper,—see where it flames up the wild cherry tree, scattering crimson leaves to the grass beneath. Once in a day's journey along the creek one may find a small red maple. In the middle of its foliage is a small, flame-like spot which grows larger day by day. Gradually some of the other maples catch the color fire, first a little soft maple by the shore of a muddy bayou, next a small sugar maple on the rocky slope. The great spectacle does not come until October, but the placards announcing it grow more numerous and vivid day by day. Blackberry leaves are splashed with crimson; daily the blood-red banner of the sumac grows larger and more striking. Walnuts and hickories begin to lose their yellow leaves; patches of yellow appear on the elms and the lindens; though the mass of the foliage remains until October, many leaves flutter down daily, and it is possible to see twice as far into the thicket as in June.

*"The wine of life keeps oozing, drop by drop;
The leaves of life keep falling, one by one."*

Flocks of grackles spend their days in the cornfields which run down to the creek bottom and their nights amid the wild rice and the rushes and willows in the swamp. In the timber fringes and the broad bottoms along the creek you get glimpses of the catbird feasting on the grapes and the wild plums; the brown thrasher and the woodthrush, wholly silent now; the little house wren who has lost her chatter; the vireos and the orioles, the wood pewee, the crested fly catcher and the kingbird. They all seem to be going southward. There are a few nests and young birds in the early part of the month—the yellow-billed cuckoo, the Savannah sparrow, the goldfinch. But these are exceptions to the general rule.

Little flocks of warblers flit among the tree tops and the bushy margin of ponds near the creek will soon be alive with the myrtle warblers—as numerous as English sparrows in a barn-yard. In the night time you may hear the “tseep” of the warblers as they wing their way swiftly towards the southland. Sometimes there is the tinkling sound of the bob-o-link, also flying in the night time, and in the morning there may be a flock of them in some meadow, leisurely getting their breakfast after their all-night flight, chattering to each other in the tinkling tones which are unlike any other song-talk in bird land.

The humming bird, the swallows, the purple martins, the chimney swifts, also seem to be a-pilgriming. Gradually you become conscious that all of them are flying southward, always down the stream and never up. The first keen blasts up in the northland have given them a warning and they are going steadily, happily, but for the most part silently, on down the stream, giving rare beauty to these halcyon days of

Page 36

late summer; on past the farthest point of your vision, where the silver gray mist softens the outline of the forest-crowned headlands, and lavender shadows hang gently across the valleys; always on and on towards the land where all is light and life and where summer ever abides in beauty. You look up and see flocks of cowbirds flying in the same direction and still larger flocks of night hawks, hundreds of them in the air at once. Like the queens on the mournful barge of the fallen King Arthur, their mission is to escort the dying summer floating down, always down

"To the island valley of Avilion; Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow, Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies Deep-meadowed, happy, fair with orchard lawns And bowery billows crown'd with summer sea.

You can climb to the highest cliff and look down to where the creek valley blends with the valley of the river, standing as did Sir Bedivere where he

... saw

Straining his eyes, beneath an arch of hand,
Or thought he saw, the speck that bare the king
Down the long water opening on the deep,
Somewhere far off, pass on, and on, and go
From less and less and vanish into light." _

The summer which has just been escorted down the valley shall come again. You remember that even the mourners after the passing of Arthur, when the first keen pangs of sorrow were over, took heart again. This was the verse they carved on his tomb:

*"Hic jacet Arthurus Rex
Quondam Rex, que Futurus."*

And the soul of the summer cannot die. In many a grateful heart it lives forever as a gentle memory of loveliness and sweetness and of inspiration to higher and better things. Neither shall it lose its individuality; for it has bestowed its peculiar charms, its own enlargements of knowledge, its rare enrichments of faith and hope; they were fuller and richer than those of any other summer. As the senses reach farther into the science of each summer, and the mind lifts the veil of Isis and sees a little farther into the harmony of her purposes, so the heart draws closer to the heart of the summer and receives a larger benediction, an essence of immortality, an ambrosial food richer and more real than that which sustained the ancient gods. And herein is hope for the race. It cannot be but that each summer, with its recollections of walks and talks with parents and friends in the summers long gone by, with its sweetest memories of life and love, with its mighty tides of growth and splendor, its wistful dreamy skies in these last days of its loveliness—it cannot be but that each summer warms many a heart with the thrill divine, lifts many a life to a plane of fairer vision and nobler purpose, instills a desire for

a life more in keeping with its own strength and cleanliness and beauty. So does each summer help the world onward to

Page 37

*"That far-off divine event
To which the whole creation moves."*