



***DALLAS LORE
SHARP***

***THE SPRING
OF THE YEAR***

A photograph of a tree trunk and pink cherry blossoms against a blue sky. The tree trunk is on the left, and the blossoms are on the right. The sky is a clear, bright blue.

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INTRODUCTION

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It has been my aim in the thirty-nine chapters of the three books in this series to carry my readers through the weeks of all the school year, not however as with a calendar, for that would be more or less wooden and artificial; but by readings, rather, that catch in a large way the spirit of the particular season, that give something definite and specific in the way of suggestions for tramps afield with things to look for and hear and do. Naturally many of the birds and animals and flowers mentioned, as well as woods and aspects of sky and field, are those of my own local environment—of my New England surrounding—and so must differ in some details from those surrounding you in your far Southern home or you on your distant Pacific coast, or you in your rich and varied valley of the Mississippi, or you on your wide and generous prairie. But the similarities and correspondences, the things and conditions we have in common, are more than our differences. Our sun, moon, sky, earth—our land—are the same, our love for this beautiful world is the same, as is that touch of nature which we all feel and which makes us all kin. Wherever, then, in these books of the seasons, the things treated differ from the things around you, read about those things for information, and in your journeys afield fill in the gaps with whatever it is that completes your landscape, or rounds out your cycle of the seasons, or links up your endless chain of life.

While I have tried to be accurate throughout these books, still it has not been my object chiefly to write a natural history—volumes of outdoor facts; but to quicken the imaginations behind the sharp eyes, behind the keen ears and the eager souls of the multitude of children who go to school, as I used to go to school, through an open, stirring, beckoning world of living things that I longed to range and understand.

The best thing that I can do as writer, that you can do as teacher, if I may quote from the last paragraph—the keynote of these volumes—is to “go into the fields and woods, go deep and far and frequently, with eyes and ears and all your souls alert.”

MULLEIN HILL, May, 1912

THE SPRING OF THE YEAR

CHAPTER I

“SPRING! SPRING! SPRING!”

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Who is your spring messenger? Is it bird or flower or beast that brings your spring? What sight or sound or smell spells S-P-R-I-N-G to you, in big, joyous letters?

Perhaps it is the frogs. Certainly I could not have a real spring without the frogs. They have peeped “Spring!” to me every time I have had a spring. Perhaps it is the arbutus, or the hepatica, or the pussy-willow, or the bluebird, or the yellow spice-bush, or, if you chance to live in New England, perhaps it is the wood pussy that brings your spring!



Beast, bird, or flower, whatever it is, there comes a day and a messenger and—spring! You know that spring is here. It may snow again before night: no matter; your messenger has brought you the news, brought you the very spring itself, and after all your waiting through the winter months are you going to be discouraged by a flurry of snow?

“All white and still lie stream and hill—
The winter dread and drear!
When from the skies a bluebird flies,
And—spring is here!”

To be sure, it is here, if the bluebird is your herald.

But how much faith in the weather you must have, and how you must long for the spring before the first bluebird brings it to you! Some sunny March day he drops down out of the blue sky, saying softly, sweetly, “Florida, florida!” as if calling the flowers; and then he is gone!—gone for days at a time, while it snows and blows and rains, freezes and thaws, thaws, thaws, until the March mud looks fitter for clams than for flowers.

So it is with the other first signs. If you want springtime ahead of time, then you must have it in your heart, out of reach of the weather, just as you must grow cucumbers in a hothouse if you want them ahead of time. But there comes a day when cucumbers will grow out of doors; and there comes a day when the bluebird and the song sparrow and all the other heralds stay, when spring has come whether you have a heart or not.

What day is that in your out-of-doors, and what sign have you to mark it? Mr. John Burroughs says his sign is the wake-robin, or trillium. When I was a school-boy it used to be for me the arbutus; but nowadays it is the shadbush: I have no sure settled spring until I see the shadbush beginning to open misty white in the edge of the woods. Then I can trust the weather; I can open my beehives; I can plough and plant my garden; I can start into the woods for a day with the birds and flowers; for when the shadbush opens, the great

gate to the woods and fields swings open—wide open to let everybody in.

But perhaps you do not know what the shadbush is? That does not matter. You can easily enough find that out. Some call it June-berry; others call it service-berry; and the botany calls it *A-me-lan'chi-er ca-na-den'sis*! But that does not matter either. For this is not a botany lesson. It is an account of how springtime comes to *me*, and when and what are its signs. And I would have you read it to think how springtime comes to *you*, and when and what are its signs. So, if the dandelion, and not the shadbush, is your sign, then you must read “dandelion” here every time I write “shadbush.”

There is an old saying, “He that would bring home the wealth of the Indies must carry the wealth of the Indies out”; which is to say, those who bring home the wealth of the Indies, must carry out some kind of wealth in exchange. So you who would enjoy or understand what my shadbush means to me must have a shadbush of your own, or a dandelion, or something that is a sign to you that spring is here. Then, you see, my chapter in the book will become your own.

There are so many persons who do not know one bird from another, one tree from another, one flower from another; who would not know one season from another did they not see the spring hats in the milliner's window or feel the need of a change of coat. I hope you are not one of them. I hope you are on the watch, instead, for the first phoebe or the earliest bloodroot, or are listening to catch the shrill, brave peeping of the little tree-frogs, the hylas.



As for me, I am on the watch for the shadbush. Oh, yes, spring comes before the shadbush opens, but it is likely not to stay. The wild geese trumpet spring in the gray March skies as they pass; a February rain, after a long cold season of snow, spatters your face with spring; the swelling buds on the maples, the fuzzy kittens on the pussy-willows, the opening marsh-marigolds in the meadows, the frogs, the bluebirds—all of these, while they stay, are the spring. But they are not sure to stay over night, here in New England. You may wake up and find it snowing—until the shadbush opens. After that, hang up your sled and skates, put away your overcoat and mittens; for spring is here, and the

honey-bees will buzz every bright day until the October asters are in bloom.

I said if you want springtime ahead of time you must have it in your heart. Of course you must. If your heart is warm and your eye is keen, you can go forth in the dead of winter and gather buds, seeds, cocoons, and living things enough to make a little spring. For the fires of summer are never wholly out. They are only banked in the winter, smouldering always under the snow, and quick to brighten and burst into blaze. There comes a warm day in January, and across your thawing path crawls a woolly-bear caterpillar; a mourning-cloak butterfly flits through the woods, and the juncos sing. That night a howling snowstorm sweeps out of the north; the coals are covered again. So they kindle and darken, until they leap from the ashes of winter a pure, thin blaze in the shadbush, to burn higher and hotter across the summer, to flicker and die away—a line of yellow embers—in the weird witch-hazel of the autumn.

At the sign of the shadbush the doors of my springtime swing wide open. My birds are back, my turtles are out, my long sleeping woodchucks are wide awake. There is not a stretch of woodland or meadow now that shows a trace of winter. Over the pasture the bluets are beginning to drift, as if the haze on the distant hills, floating down in the night, had been caught in the dew-wet grass. They wash the field to its borders in their delicate azure hue. At the sign of the shadbush the doors of my memory, too, swing wide open, and I am a boy again in the meadows of my old home. The shadbush is in blossom, and the fish are running—the sturgeon up the Delaware; the shad up Cohansey Creek;

and through the Lower Sluice, these soft, stirring nights, the catfish are slipping. Is there any real boy now in Lupton's Meadows to watch them come? Oh yes, doubtless; and doubtless there ever shall be. But I would go down for this one night, down in the May moonlight, and listen, as I used to listen years ago, for the quiet *splash splash splash*, as the swarming catfish pass through the shallows of the main ditch, up toward the dam at the pond.

At the sign of the shadbush how swiftly the tides of life begin to rise! How mysteriously their currents run!—the fish swimming in from the sea, the birds flying up from the South, the flowers opening fresh from the soil, the insects coming out from their sleep: life moving everywhere—across the heavens, over the earth, along the deep, dim aisles of the sea!

CHAPTER II

THE SPRING RUNNING

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This title is Kipling's; the observations that follow are mine; but the real spring running is yours and mine and Kipling's and Mowgli the wolf-child's, whose running Kipling has told us about. Indeed, every child of the earth has felt it, has had the running—every living thing of the land and the sea.

Everything feels it; everything is restless, everything is moving. The renter changes houses; the city dweller goes “down to the shore” or up to the mountains to open his summer cottage; the farmer starts to break up the land for planting; the schoolchildren begin to squirm in their seats and long to fly out of the windows; and “Where are you *going* this summer?” is on every one's lips.

They have all caught the spring running, the only infection I know that you can catch from April skies. The very sun has caught it, too, and is lengthening out his course, as if he hated to stop and go to bed at night. And the birds, that are supposed to go to bed most promptly, they sleep, says the good old poet Chaucer, with open eye, these April nights, so bad is their case of spring running,—

“So priketh hem Nature in hir corages.”[\[1\]](#)

[\[1\]](#) So nature pricks (stirs) them in their hearts.

Their long journey northward over sea and land has not cured them yet of their unrest. Only one thing will do it (and