

AN OREGON SPRING.

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How I should like to write to you, sweet Spring,
A lovely little song about the birds,
And the dear, early flowers; but then the thing
Is done so often, that I fear no words
Could be selected, that would not seem stale,
To one so used to praise, and you'll excuse
My dressing up a three times thrice told tale
In the poor speech of my ungraceful muse.

We will therefore dispense with flights of fancy and confine ourselves to facts. An Oregon Spring is apt to be showery. There is such an overplus of moisture in the earth that when the warm sun begins a rapid evaporation, the work has to be done over and over again; for no sooner does the invisible vapor get "sky-high," than a cool current of air comes down from the mountains and condensing it at a touch, precipitates the same moisture upon us that we vainly fancied had been gotten rid of. And so we have flying showers in plenty, and every now and then a genuine pouring rain.

Humanity grows rather tired, sometimes, of this sort of thing. But the earth enjoys it. If you do not believe it, come with me to the woods, and I will prove it to you—aye, even in March. The turf in the flat or hollow places is soaked with water, like a sponge, and if you do not step carefully you will press it out over your shoe-tops; but by dint of quick eyes and agile movement, you will escape any serious mishaps. Climbing over logs, jumping weather ditches, and crossing creeks, furnishes the necessary excitement and exercise by which you keep off a chill; for if you were to sit down to Summer reveries at this time of year, the doctor would be in requisition directly.

Here we are at last, at the very foot of the mountain; and what does this forest recess furnish us? What magnificent great trees! Fir, cedar, and here and there along this little creek, a yew, a maple, or an alder. Hardly a ray of sunshine ever penetrates this green and purple gloom. Spring and Fall, Winter and Summer are much the same here—a difference only of water. In summer the creek is within bounds, and you can lie on the mosses, if you feel disposed. "What lie on the mosses? every one of which seems such a marvel of beauty. What a wonderful—what a charming spot! I never in all my life!"

No, of course you never saw anything like it, this is the only country out of the tropics where vegetation has such a remarkable growth. Here are a dozen kinds of elegant green mosses in a group, to say nothing of the tiny gray and brown and yellow varieties with which we have always been familiar, besides lichens innumerable. Observe those fallen trees. Their immense trunks are swathed in elegant blankets of emerald brightness. See here, I can tear them off by the yard;—enough on one tree to carpet a room! Look at that pendant moss—two feet long at least—and what a vivid yellow-green!

Just step up a little higher; I will show you a wonder. Did you ever dream of anything so marvelous as *that* bank of moss? Six inches high, branching like a fern, yet fine and delicate as that on the calyx of a moss-rose. Here is enough, if preserved, to furnish all the flower-makers; and glad would they be to get it. And ferns—yes, indeed! Just look at this maidenhair. It is of every size, from the delicate plant three inches high, to the mature one of fifteen or eighteen inches. And here are some that have stood all Winter in their Autumn dress. See how exquisitely they are tinted—raw-sienna, for the body color, and such delicate marking in vandyke-brown on every leaf; or gold color, marked with burnt-sienna; and all relieved so beautifully by the polished black of their slender stems. There are all the other species besides; but I never pay much attention to the rest, when the dainty maidenhair is present.

But we must not stop long in this dense and damp shade; there might be an intermittent lurking in it for unaccustomed town-folk. I thought I would give you an introduction to the place, and let you prosecute the acquaintance at your own pleasure. But just note, as we retrace our steps, the great variety of plants, some of them very beautiful, that grow all Winter long in these solitary places. This handsome variegated leaf comes from a bulbous root, and bears a lily-shaped flower, I am told; but being new to me I cannot yet classify it. We are still too far from open sunlight to be much among flowering plants.

But directly we come to occasional openings, or to higher benches of

ground that get the light and drainage, we shall see adder-tongue, Solomon's-seal, anemone, wild violet, and spring-beauty, putting up their leaves, waiting for sunny days enough to dare to bring out their blossoms. Here too, are two species of creeping vines, very delicate and graceful, trailing along the ground, with little fresh leaflets already growing. In April one of them will blossom, with dainty, pinkish-white, trumpet-shaped flowers, very lovely to behold. The botanical names of these trailing plants I am ignorant of. One is vulgarly called *Oregon Tea*, from the spicy flavor of its leaves, which make an agreeable infusion.

Now we get down to the woods along the river-bank. Ah, here is really a blossoming shrub, the flowering currant. In haste to brighten the dull March weather with a touch of color over the green and brown and purple tints that are so melancholy under a cloudy sky, the currant does not wait to put forth its foliage first, but crimson all over with thickest flowers, in racemes of nearly a finger's length. There are two varieties of the red, and one of the yellow—all beautiful and ornamental shrubs. In company with this still leafless shrub, is the glossy arbutus (misnamed laurel), with its fresh suit of light and bright green reflecting every ray of light from its polished surface. The arbutus grows all Winter, putting forth its delicate shoots from December to March, and flowering later in the Spring. Its cheerful light green makes it a perfect complement to the red of the currant when flowering; and by not looking at all like an evergreen, which it really is, bewilders the beholder, who sees it growing luxuriantly all along the river banks, at this time of the year.

Here is another elegant shrub that does its growing in the Winter, and takes the long dry Summer to ripen its fruit and be beautiful in—the *Berberis Aquifolium* or holly-leaved barberry, commonly known as the Oregon grape. It is looking as fresh and piquant in March as though it had all of April and May behind it. All around us, on every hand, are plants and shrubs or trees growing. Behold these graceful little yew-trees, two feet high. They look as though they had come up in a day, so delicate and *new* they seem. Examine the ends of the fir-boughs; and