

MOTHER NATURE, WE ARE RIGHT WITH YOU!

BY ROBERT SPARKS WALKER

GRAVITY, wind, water and fire are not only the servants of man but of every living thing whether it creeps over the earth or remains stationary, be it plant or animal. These powerful agents are encouraged or discouraged as the needs of each creation demands. In seeking the gratification of its own particular requirements each species of animal or plant assists nature in her ultimate plan for the fuller and more complete development of the earth.

In seeking the safety and welfare of its own self and the assurance of a perpetuation of its species, various creatures are brought to clash with each other which has given recognition to the old natural law known as the "survival of the fittest." Nature's abhorrence of the willful weaklings is something terrible. If there is one class of her children that she constantly pats on the back and applauds them when they succeed it is the strong healthy creatures who are able to perform their work in life promptly and satisfactorily.

The motives of Nature are sometimes misunderstood, but infrequently a person stumbles onto a truth that opens his eyes. Even some well-to-do theorists and persons who leave to another to do his or her own thinking, become suspicious of Nature's motives. Nature is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Knowing this to be a true definition of her character, it is man's golden opportunity to study her ways. If he is normal, mentally and otherwise, by his very nature, he cannot avoid enthusiastically declaring, "Mother Nature, I am right with you!"

Nature has but a single message to all her children. When she has fed, clothed, schooled, and disciplined them to a certain period in their lives, she thrusts them into the world with the command, "Go conquer, but serve as you go!" This command may be read in the very nature of every living plant or animal. The only exception is found in the individual who is cursed with idleness. Idle-

ness in Nature has but one doom—extinction! The wages of idleness and carelessness in nature, is extinction.

This is forcibly illustrated in the members of the bird family which are prudent enough to forbid members of the human family, or other enemies to come within reach of their own bodies. Nature pats the backs of her wild fowls that take this precaution and declares, "thou shalt live and prosper!"

There is a gorge on the side of Lookout Mountain. The conspiracy of gravity and water has carried away tons of loose earth and lodged it in the bed of a river near its base. Azaleas, trailing arbutus, huckleberries and mosses have combined their forces and have checked these agents in their destructive work along the side of the gorge. When I observed their motives and the success of their efforts, I simply had to exclaim, "I am right with you!"

These necessary agents of nature become as destructive as they are constructive when Nature's creatures begin to exert the governing hand. But there are no efforts in nature that become really pitiable, yet no one can study her motives without falling in sympathy with her efforts. For example, where is the same mortal who can confine his observations to a single species of birds for a season without accepting the lessons that nature teaches in rearing and caring for his own children? The old bird chooses the food for the young, selects the drinking water to quench their thirst, practices sanitation in keeping the nesting quarters clean and wholesome, and extends due protection over the young until when? Until the children are able to fly and provide a living for themselves. No one can observe this example of Nature's without taking it seriously, and it points out clearly where we have failed in training young Americans today. We older birds must shoulder the blame. Where is the mortal with influence sufficient to induce a mother bird to leave her baby long enough to attend some avian jubilee, or other social frolic? Where is the avian mother who is willing to go away and trust her babies to the care of a crow or jay? Mother Nature, I am right with you on this child problem!

I have been studying Nature with varying degrees of interest for the last thirty years. Sometimes I become conceited enough to feel that I am a close observer for some of the new observations that I make. Many of my friends whom I have invited to go on walks with me among wonderful nature spots, cause me some distress on some of these outings, for the fact that I seem to be compelled to waste so much valuable time trying to direct their attention to some

wonderful flower, insect, animal, tree or plant, or to a vista which may include a group of all of these. Frequently, I am out with a friend, and I talk myself almost hoarse, telling him some of the wonderful peculiarities of a certain plant that we meet, and still I know from the low grunts that come in acknowledgement of my efforts, simply indicate that my friend sees nothing of unusual interest.

In the midst of some of these nature spots with enough inspiration to make a normal person burst into enthusiasm, he walks along, with mind on politics, business or some other decadent subject, and while I cannot anchor his attention, I know that among these wonderful nature subjects, should a certain politician or orator suddenly appear, he would burst forth in enthusiasm, throw his hat into the air and scream himself almost hoarse!

But I must have patience and sympathy, because I am frequently confronted by an intimation that I, myself, am not a close observer. An example of this sort I had forcibly brought to my attention during the month of January, 1921. That month with us is usually fraught with days of cold and sleet, but this one was for the most part sunny. If there are certain nature spots around which I have spent much time in observation, it is the swamps, ponds, and creeks, and especially when some of them were frozen over. In the above-mentioned month, while passing over a viaduct beneath which was a swamp covering several acres whose surface was a frozen mass, I observed a beautiful and most perfect rainbow. It was as perfect as the most handsome design that was ever strung up in the clouds. I spent sometime in observing this wonderful display of colors. One thing in particular that I noticed was that one end of the rainbow kept directly beneath my feet as I walked slowly across the viaduct.

The next week on a similar sunny morning, while passing around a pond whose surface was scum and trash-laden, I was pleasantly surprised to have set before me another wonderful optic feast in the form of another rainbow. Strange enough, shortly after leaving the pond, in my dew-covered path where it lead through a meadow, in a curve and sharp depression there was depicted in the thousands of dewdrops, a faint rainbow! Conditions seemed favorable that morning for the sun's rays to produce two remarkable rainbows, yet I could not help from feeling that I, myself, had been a poor observer in the past. People do not usually look for rainbows in such places, but it is frequently in the unexpected places that nature springs her greatest surprises. In this success of Nature in laying

emphasis on the fact that some of her most beautiful creations lie in the humble walks of life, I said, "Nature, I am right with you!"

Sensible people are oftentimes guilty of severe criticism of the behavior of lesser animals, particularly those of insects, when their activities conflict with their own. Such criticism would soon lose some of its harshness, if people could understand that each insect, or other creature, has its own problems to work out, which are as important to its existence as ours is to us. We see almost daily, an illustration of this kind. I recall an observation that I made at a Boy Scout summer camp one summer recently. The site of the camp is on a table-like place near the foot of a mountain. All around, the tents were pitched. In walking over the grounds, I observed a number of burrows which I supposed were dug by the digger wasps. This insect is the large wasp who steals upon the harvest fly, or cicada as it is called, pounces upon its body and inflicts many stings. The sting does not kill the harvest fly, but produces a long drawn-out attack of paralysis. When it attacks the harvest fly, in the melee, they both fall to the ground, the harvest fly keeping up a cry of distress. The trophy is too large for the digger wasp to carry when she flies upwards, or even on a straight line, so she gets halfway astride of her prey, and by the use of her wings in beating the air, she is enabled to ascend the tree with her heavy load. On reaching the top of the tree, she hauls the harvest fly out on a leaf, and after grasping it firmly with her feet, makes a slanting sail, sometimes for a distance of more than a hundred yards, and strikes the ground as near her burrow as possible. When she reaches the ground, she rushes the harvest fly into the previously prepared burrow. She then deposits an egg on the paralyzed body of the harvest fly, and when the egg hatches, the young digger wasp is assured fresh food, for no mother digger wasp is willing to feed her babies on anything except fresh and wholesome food!

At the summer camp, a visiting professor was to devote an hour after luncheon to a description of Yellowstone National Park. The cots were removed from the tents and arranged in horseshoe shape to serve as seats.

The program had proceeded only a short ways when a large wasp appeared on the scene, and while it made no attempt to sting any one, it came near putting the audience to rout. The digger wasp concentrated her attention on the speaker and his audience who were seated directly in front of him. She poised her body in front of each hearer as if trying to persuade him to do something. She plead,

she begged, she coaxed, she threatened, but not one understood her desires. In their fright, the campers came near overturning their cots a number of times. Towels were employed for weapons in driving the horrid looking wasp away. They believed such a huge wasp was a dangerous creature. The poor wasp was slow to give up. I longed for the opportunity to explain to the frenzied crowd the mission of the mother wasp, but could not do it without disturbing the speaker. The wasp then tried hard to get the speaker to understand, but he only took a number of violent slaps at her.

After twenty minutes of persistent work, the mother wasp gave up and flew swiftly up the side of the mountain. In keeping my eyes on the digger wasp, and in watching for her expected return, I forgot the speaker for a few moments. Within five minutes after she had abandoned the premises, she came sailing down the mountain side, bearing a huge heavy load—a paralyzed body of a harvest fly. She struck the ground with her burden near the feet of the speaker, and marched proudly in front of him hauling her prey into a burrow which she had previously prepared.

The secret had vanished. The poor digger wasp was not waging an offensive war against anyone, but was only trying to persuade the speaker and his hearers who sat directly in front to clear the way that she might make a successful descent with her heavy load. She evidently wished not to collide with a crowd of men. Her prize had doubtless already been sighted, and she had only a few moments to clear the way before the harvest fly made its escape. Deeply interested in her work in providing fresh food for her children that were yet to be born, she took the risk, and succeeded in steering her body that she struck within a very few feet of her burrow, without an accident, and without harming any one! Mother Nature, we are right with you!

We see Nature and her activities in the lesser animals and plants as something trivial, because we do not understand. Nature does not always speed up her operations, and hence her achievements oftentimes come slowly.

We cannot observe the growth of a tree or plant, but we know that growth takes place. The insect acts wisely but, it is so small that it escapes our notice. The birds pursue their busy trades, yet we pitch our observations only at their feathers and songs. Nature is constantly working to make the world better, and a fitter place in which to live. She knows that to do this properly, precautions must be made for the care and protection of the young. In achieving this

very thing, she is practicing the very principles that we hold as our ideals—thrift, frugality, prudence.

If we study Nature, we shall appreciate her every movement, and we shall sympathize more and more with her efforts to such an extent that we can exclaim in unison, "Mother Nature, we are right with you!"