

## WINTER'S CHARMS

Elizabeth Cruickshank

*"O Nature! A' they moods and forms  
To feeling, pensive hearts ha'e charms!  
Whether the summer kindly warms  
Wi' life and light,  
Or winter howls, in gusty storms  
The lang, dark night."*

THE daily joys of winter may be small compared to the larger joys of the other seasons. But while we long for the time when "April melts into May-time" what delights one wee Downy Woodpecker can bring to us as he samples the budgies' seeds we have added to the bill of fare!

What fun, too, there is in deciphering track language as, like Thoreau, we make every walk a "pilgrimage to the Holy Land that lies about us." We follow tiny mouse tracks, wondering why all the leaps, to get now-where. Nature, we know, is preparing her everlasting miracle beneath the snow blanket. Do mice travel under its protecting cover? Cat foot prints make us breathe a little prayer for all "those that are hunted and go in fear."

While we saw the tracks of a lone Jack rabbit often, only once did we surprise him. How very tall he looked as he stretched himself on his hind feet when he stopped to watch Fogarty's merry, but futile pursuit!

The pigeon lofts that swallows shared in summer, near the golf course, have been closed. We wonder if that accounts for the fact that we have seen fewer other birds around. We had hoped to see for ourselves this year if, as someone has said, those Barn Swallows always line their nests with small, only white, feathers.

Even though the heart may make its own weather, as the poet says, there are days when our joys must be found indoors with books and study.

We read about the Horsetail Family, and with what added beauty has our mind's eye now clothed this little cryptogam, since we have examined the spore of the fertile shoot to find a living, brilliant emerald.

A magic carpet transports us where its jointed stems form a forest in miniature (as the giant jointed trees formed the great forest *primaeval*) where grows, during the season,

bunchberry and anemone: where young poplars hang with the vivid orange blossoms of the climbing honeysuckle; where the sickly odour of licorice rises from the broken stems of the sweet cicely; where the deep pink wintergreen bloom adds ineffable richness to the gloom of its background; where the Wilson's Thrush calls from its cathedral spires as the golden rays of the setting sun catch the tall treetops.

Regina is spreading out where, for years, we have enjoyed the patches of heavenly blue pentstemon. I think of all the shades in that blue prairie embroidery as I study the funnel-form blossom and see the sterile hairy spatulate stamen (the bearded tongue) beside the four fertile stamens.

A whole new beautiful world—no matter what the temperature—opens up for us. Studying with a microscope not only satisfies one's quest for beauty and knowledge but amazes with the wonder and glory of the symphony that is a flower. Knowing them intimately breeds, too, a deep respect for them—for their right to grow and fulfil their destiny.

To some, winter may be a time when beauty is "o'ersnowed and barrenness everywhere." Yet, how often have we opened our doors of a morning on a fresh world of blue and white, with glimmers of gold from the rising sun. How many times have our senses ached with the sudden splendor of the silver tapestry of the hedge, the pure poetry of the trees, the ice-bouquets, the bowing grasses with their frost fringes! How often have we felt, as Mary felt before her Son was born, that the "world was full of soft music"!

Our hearts hear that melody now, but yet a little while and our eyes will behold and our ears hear the songsters of spring for soon, very soon, the robins will return.

Yet, winter has its charms!