

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada Ebook ***

This ebook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the ebook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the ebook. If either of these conditions applies, please check with an FP administrator before proceeding.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. **If the book is under copyright in your country, do not download or redistribute this file.**

Title: The Springtime [the tenth story in "A Little Book of Profitable Tales"]

Author: Field, Eugene (1850-1895)

Date of first publication: 1889

Edition used as base for this ebook: New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894

Date first posted: 23 July 2010

Date last updated: 17 June 2014

Faded Page ebook#20100717

This ebook was produced by: David Edwards, woodie4 & the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

This file was produced from images generously made available by the Internet Archive/American Libraries



The Springtime.



THE SPRINGTIME.

A child once said to his grandsire: "Gran'pa, what do the flowers mean when they talk to the old oak-tree about death? I hear them talking every day, but I cannot understand; it is all very strange."

The grandsire bade the child think no more of these things; the flowers were foolish prattlers,—what right had they to put such notions into a child's head? But the child did not do his grandsire's bidding; he loved the flowers and the trees, and he went each day to hear them talk.

It seems that the little vine down by the stone-wall had overheard the south wind say to the rosebush: "You are a proud, imperious beauty now, and will not listen to my suit; but wait till my boisterous brother comes from the North,—then you will droop and wither and die, all because you would not listen to me and fly with me to my home by the Southern sea."

These words set the little vine to thinking; and when she had thought for a long time she spoke to the daisy about it, and the daisy called in the violet, and the three little ones had a very serious conference; but, having talked it all over, they came to the conclusion that it was as much of a mystery as ever. The old oak-tree saw them.

"You little folks seem very much puzzled about something," said the old oak-tree.

"I heard the south wind tell the rosebush that she would die," exclaimed the vine, "and we do not understand what it is. Can you tell us what it is to die?"

The old oak-tree smiled sadly.

"I do not call it death," said the old oak-tree; "I call it sleep,—a long, restful, refreshing sleep."

"How does it feel?" inquired the daisy, looking very full of astonishment and anxiety.

"You must know," said the old oak-tree, "that after many, many days we all have had such merry times and have bloomed so long and drunk so heartily of the dew and sunshine and eaten so much of the goodness of the earth that we feel very weary and we long for repose. Then a great wind comes out of the north, and we shiver in its icy blast. The sunshine goes away, and there is no dew for us nor any nourishment in the earth, and we are glad to go to sleep."

"Mercy on me!" cried the vine, "I shall not like that at all! What, leave this smiling meadow and all the pleasant grass and singing bees and frolicsome butterflies? No, old oak-tree, I would never go to sleep; I much prefer sporting with the winds and playing with my little friends, the daisy and the violet."

"And I," said the violet, "I think it would be dreadful to go to sleep. What if we never should wake up again!"

The suggestion struck the others dumb with terror,—all but the old oak-tree.

"Have no fear of that," said the old oak-tree, "for you are sure to awaken again, and when you have awakened the new life will be sweeter and happier than the old."

"What nonsense!" cried the thistle. "You children shouldn't believe a word of it. When you go to sleep you die, and when you die there's the last of you!"

The old oak-tree reproved the thistle; but the thistle maintained his abominable heresy so stoutly that the little vine and the daisy and the violet were quite at a loss to know which of the two to believe,—the old oak-tree or the thistle.

The child heard it all and was sorely puzzled. What was this death, this mysterious sleep? Would it come upon him, the child? And after he had slept awhile would he awaken? His grandsire would not tell him of these things; perhaps his grandsire did not know.

It was a long, long summer, full of sunshine and bird-music, and the meadow was like a garden, and the old oak-tree looked down upon the grass and flowers and saw that no evil befell them. A long, long play-day it was to the little vine, the daisy, and the violet. The crickets and the grasshoppers and the bumblebees joined in the sport, and romped and made music till it seemed like an endless carnival. Only every now and then the vine and her little flower friends talked with the old oak-tree about that strange sleep and the promised awakening, and the thistle scoffed at the old oak-tree's cheering words. The child was there and heard it all.

One day the great wind came out of the north. Hurry-scurry! back to their warm homes in the earth and under the old stone-wall scampered the crickets and bumblebees to go to sleep. Whirr, whirr! Oh, but how piercing the great wind was; how different from his amiable brother who had travelled all the way from the Southern sea to kiss the flowers and woo the rose!

"Well, this is the last of us!" exclaimed the thistle; "we're going to die, and that's the end of it all!"

"No, no," cried the old oak-tree; "we shall not die; we are going to sleep. Here, take my leaves, little flowers, and you shall sleep warm under them. Then, when you awaken, you shall see how much sweeter and happier the new life is."

The little ones were very weary indeed. The promised sleep came very gratefully.

"We would not be so willing to go to sleep if we thought we should not awaken," said the violet.

So the little ones went to sleep. The little vine was the last of all to sink to her slumbers; she nodded in the wind and tried to keep awake till she saw the old oak-tree close his eyes, but her efforts were vain; she nodded and nodded, and bowed her slender form against the old stone-wall, till finally she, too, had sunk into repose. And then the old oak-tree stretched his weary limbs and gave a last look at the sullen sky and at the slumbering little ones at his feet; and with that, the old oak-tree fell asleep too.

The child saw all these things, and he wanted to ask his grandsire about them, but his grandsire would not tell him of them; perhaps his grandsire did not know.

The child saw the storm-king come down from the hills and ride furiously over the meadows and over the forest and over the town. The snow fell everywhere, and the north wind played solemn music in the chimneys. The storm-king put the brook to bed, and threw a great mantle of snow over him; and the brook that had romped and prattled all the summer and told pretty tales to the grass and flowers, the brook went to sleep too. With all his fierceness and bluster, the storm-king was very kind; he did not awaken the old oak-tree and the slumbering flowers. The little vine lay under the fleecy snow against the old stone-wall and slept peacefully, and so did the violet and the daisy. Only the wicked old thistle thrashed about in his sleep as if he dreamt bad dreams, which, all will allow, was no more than he deserved.

All through that winter—and it seemed very long—the child thought of the flowers and the vine and the old oak-tree, and wondered whether in the springtime they would awaken from their sleep; and he wished for the springtime to come. And at last the springtime came. One day the sunbeams fluttered down from the sky and danced all over the meadow.

"Wake up, little friends!" cried the sunbeams,— "wake up, for it is the springtime!"

The brook was the first to respond. So eager, so fresh, so exuberant was he after his long winter sleep, that he leaped from his bed and frolicked all over the meadow and played all sorts of curious antics. Then a little bluebird was seen in the hedge one morning. He was calling to the violet.

"Wake up, little violet," called the bluebird. "Have I come all this distance to find you sleeping? Wake up; it is the springtime!"

That pretty little voice awakened the violet, of course.

"Oh, how sweetly I have slept!" cried the violet; "how happy this new life is! Welcome, dear friends!"

And presently the daisy awakened, fresh and beautiful, and then the little vine, and, last of all, the old oak-tree. The meadow was green, and all around there were the music, the fragrance, the new, sweet life of the springtime.

"I slept horribly," growled the thistle. "I had bad dreams. It was sleep, after all, but it ought to have been death."

The thistle never complained again; for just then a four-footed monster stalked through the meadow and plucked and ate the thistle and then stalked gloomily away; which was the last of the sceptical thistle,—truly a most miserable end!

"You said the truth, dear old oak-tree!" cried the little vine. "It was not death,—it was only a sleep, a sweet, refreshing sleep, and this awakening is very beautiful."

They all said so,—the daisy, the violet, the oak-tree, the crickets, the bees, and all the things and creatures of the field

and forest that had awakened from their long sleep to swell the beauty and the glory of the springtime. And they talked with the child, and the child heard them. And although the grandsire never spoke to the child about these things, the child learned from the flowers and trees a lesson of the springtime which perhaps the grandsire never knew.

1885.

[End of *The Springtime* by Eugene Field]