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Rustle of Spring

READERS will notice sounds of disappointment in our Spring symposium (pages 6-7) when contributors speak of the weather. There are suggestions that Spring is a let-down; it does not come as it should, with a sudden glory. People who have known the season in other countries are unable to forget its contrasts with what has gone before. In place of a shout (they say), we have only a whisper: the green comes stealthily, if it has ever been absent; the season limps and hesitates, and brings nothing to sing about. Yet the birds seem not to agree. As dawn comes earlier, new voices are heard from the garden, and the trees are in a shrill commotion.

In a temperate climate the seasons are so blurred at the edges that people argue about them. Experts may tell us that Winter begins late in June, but we don't believe them: it begins for us when we have to light fires and get up in the dark, and the start of the trouble is the big southerly that comes in the middle of May. Spring is harder to find: perhaps it comes to people at different times and in different ways. Some can wake on a particular morning and know that the change is here. The day need not be perfect; it may even be a little wild—the trees bending, and the sky clouded and moving; and yet in spite of the cloud there is no greyness, and the air can be tasted. Others may meet the newcomer in the garden, where they bend reflectively over the soil, perhaps to dabble their fingers in it, and decide to buy small seeds in the lunch hour. Doubters may wait, until in the end not even they can fail to note the prodigious growth of weeds. Most infallible sign, however, is the appearance of small boys with kites. Nobody tells them the time has come: they simply know, and the message is heard by every

generation. Birds and children understand these things better than we do.

It often happens that Spring arrives with false smiles in a week of perfect weather. Few of us, no matter how long we live in the world, fail to be tricked by this early and brief serenity. It makes us feel that what comes after, when the blossom is swept from the fruit trees and the broad beans and green peas are thrust to the ground with broken stalks, is a sort of betrayal. Even the most patient gardener will forget sometimes that the steady growth which fattens our sheep is the gift of a season that must be long and boisterous. At such times of disillusionment it is salutary to remember how closely we identify our lives with the moods of the year. Spring is youth, and youth is growth and vitality, and therefore unpredictable and a little untidy. If our children passed at once from that early glow of Spring to full Summer, they would escape much buffeting, but they would be too soft for the rigours to come. Older people, whose early storms are over, know well enough that there can be sharp changes of the weather when they expect it to be settled; they face the wind and the rain resignedly, and speak sadly of the climate. Not for them the challenge of the skies and the tingling in the veins when those westerlies leap hungrily at our coasts. Yet sometimes they can be taken by surprise. On a morning when the winds are quiet, when the garden is putting out new leaves almost visibly, and the flight of birds is purposeful, they may feel a strange expectancy; and because they are tied to projects and responsibilities, they interpret the feeling to suit their needs, and begin to wonder hopefully if this year there might be some gift of fortune, some easing of a burden, some bright prospect of advancement. But it is only the rustle of Spring.

N.Z. LISTENER, SEPTEMBER 7, 1956.