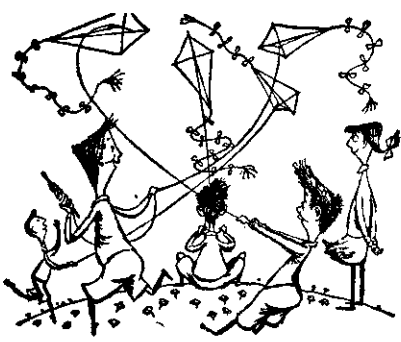


What Spring Means to Me

A symposium to greet the hopeful season



WIND and sleet, squelching feet; the faint hope that another summer may come, and that I may survive to see it. What in Europe is an annual excitement, a miraculous rebirth of the world, is here a miserable in-between season of showers, puddles and wet

Spring Atishoo

trouser-legs, of blustering winds and cold, sloppy back-yards. I speak of the North Island. To be accurate, there are parts of the South Island—for instance, the Botanical Gardens in Christchurch—that look more English than the English in September or October.

And, to be scrupulously objective, that bit about a "miraculous rebirth" may sound good, but it usually happens in a sort of twilight sleep. Turning to my *Oxford Book of Quotations* to see what other noble minds have thought about the matter, I find that William Cowper, writing to the Rev. W. Unwin on 8th June, 1783, made reference to "our severest winter, commonly called the spring." As another poet put it—

When the hounds of spring are on winter's traces
You can bet that it's going to be wet for the races.

In the North Island, "spring" should always be written in inverted commas. This present winter has been unusually "spring"-like. Indeed, the Weather Office might well save wear and tear on the human larynx by getting a record made of that bit about "winds from a westerly quarter, with occasional showers." In Auckland, Nature herself has been in a confused state of mind: one saw, in June, young green foliage on oak trees from which last season's leaves had not yet fallen.

Personally, I blame the Bomb. Not on any sordidly rational grounds, but simply because I happen to be one of the 2,000,000-odd people in New Zealand who are victims of that last infirmity of the unphilosophical mind—grousing about the weather. I have an emotional need to blame somebody. The Bomb fills the bill. —A. R. D. Fairburn

SPRING-TIME no longer spurs me towards hat shops or frock departments. I just bring out those bought at last Summer's sales, and substitute a cotton blouse for a wool-jumper with my lightest costume. New gloves and handbag finish me off. What really occupies me about 12 hours per day is coping with the floods of most interesting letters asking questions about Spring-time meals. Nowadays, the young ones don't necessarily ask for information—they are able to give it! And the experienced housewives welcome the new ideas of the travelled youngsters, as well as coming to the rescue when things go wrong. Vitamins take a back seat—people want lamb and asparagus and green peas and new potatoes and Spring onions and young lettuce and radishes. "What joint of lamb should I buy for just us?" writes the newly-wed; and how do you preserve asparagus? And what was the French way of doing green peas you gave us two years ago, and how do you make a really light asparagus soufflé? How do the Americans do that minted peas recipe, using cream? One girl told me how delightful spring mint can be if very finely chopped and sprinkled over fruit salad as well as

Never a Dull Moment

savoury. Another discovered the different flavour of the tender stalks of pink Spring rhubarb after being brought up on the ordinary kind. And, of course, there are plenty of eggs to be used in all manner of recipes—Spring-time is egg-time, they say. Never a dull moment in the kitchen!

—Aunt Daisy

ANYONE professionally engaged in forecasting the weather finds it possible to greet the coming of Spring with only mild enthusiasm. It at least enables one to forget the winter-time story of intense depressions moving on to New Zealand from the Tasman Sea and to end the indiscriminate scattering of rain

Strong Westerly Winds

(heavy at times) over the entire country. However, one is obliged to substitute a new story about deep depressions passing far to the south of New Zealand with strong westerly winds over most of the country.

And certain snags still remain. These westerly winds almost invariably contain numerous cold fronts, and as they are moving rapidly in the strong westerly flow their speeds have to be estimated with more than usual accuracy if the timing of the forecasts is to be reasonably correct. Southland is usually the chief sufferer from errors of this nature. Of course, in eastern districts there is normally less rain around; but then again more people are interested in knowing just where and when it is going to fall. So all in all, one is not much better off than in winter.

In the same way there are the frosts to think about. All through the winter one has been forecasting frosts (big ones, too) almost every night, and although great success was achieved nobody seemed much interested. But in Spring, with frosts fewer in number, smaller in magnitude and harder to forecast, suddenly every farmer in the country seems interested!

Ah, yes, for the weather forecaster, Spring is rather like the other seasons of the year—there just ain't no justice.

—J. W. Hutchings

I CELEBRATE past Springs in a far-off place, simply from a strong wish to become again a close and present part of that country; a little valley under Mt. Cucuma, about twenty miles from the Pacific in the Mexican State of Baja California. Spring lasts five minutes there; six minutes if the winter was exceptionally wet

In a Far Country

and precipitated eight inches of rain on the surprised ground. If you blink on a sunny day in the first week of February you may miss the moment of blossom of the almond trees. Blink again, and you'll find under your feet a purple carpet of minute star-shaped flowers the Mexicans call *filaria*. The colour of winter there is the colour of the earth, a tawny brown with occasional slashes of red. Most mornings when I got up and looked out of my front door, like a high dive platform above the valley, there would be a light frost powdering the earth colour. Then one day soon after a rain, when I came back later in the morning, the frost gone and the sun high, I'd see a green haze on the earth colour. Next day it

would be more definite, and the third day the valley would be green. One Spring I walked each day in the valley with a St. Bernard, who dropped his expression of gravity when he only had my company, and gambolled and caracolled among the willows in the creek bed. There we made progress through our brief Spring. The *filaria* came first and lasted longest. Instantly, lasting only a few days, were white and gold varieties of what I took to be poppies, the purple wild pea, occasional briar roses, and white moonflowers in the creek. Sometimes we walked higher up the hillside, along tracks made by a neighbour's herd of cows as they went to and from grazing each day. As I waited on the dog's investigations I could see the pink and white fuzz of fruit blossom blowing in the little orchards by the Tecate road. It was a quick completion. A week or two of these walks and the dog brushed by me smelling of sage, which is the beginning of summer, a much longer, drowsier story.

—G. leF. Y.

BEETHOVEN'S Spring Sonata, the Spring Symphonies of Schumann and Britten, Rondes de Printemps, Sacre du Printemps, Yvonne Printemps—Spring has enough in the way of musical associations to warm the heart of the most winter-bound musician.

There are at least three composers who have set all four seasons—

A Bird Singing

Haydn turned out an oratorio, Glazounov a ballet, and Vivaldi, of all things, a series of violin concerti. But Spring leads summer by a head as the seasonal source of inspiration. It is partly the fault of the poets. Were I a composer, I could scarcely resist having another go at "Spring, the Sweet Spring," or "Now is the Month of Maying."

In connection with May, the vernal month of the European poets, we of the Antipodes are in a quandary. We either resign ourselves to singing nonsense, or we try "Now is the Month of Novembering," which does not fit very well with the tune. Troublesome, too, is the cuckoo as a symbol of Spring—not the long-tailed cuckoo, mark you, nor yet the shining variety, but the ordinary English rapsallion, the only one of the three who is blest with a voice. Yet, though he reiterates his two-note melody 12,000 miles away, and six months too soon or too late, I would not be surprised if many of my New Zealand colleagues agreed that the joy of Spring-tide finds its happiest musical expression in Delius's exquisite little piece, "On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring."

—James Robertson

HOW should I know what this Spring will mean to me until it comes? For all I can really say is that this Spring or that Spring have meant this or that thing to me. But Spring itself, Spring in the abstract? What I should like it to mean it usually doesn't. Spring is the time when one hopefully

How Should I Know?

takes off one's winter underwear and hurriedly puts it on again. There are new leaves on some of the trees—but others have kept theirs all winter. There are flowers—but there have been flowers all

