

Morning and Evening Were a Full Day

Daybreak to Backbreak

You can learn what skilled work is if you follow in your mind a farmer's wife of the Thirties as she went about her daily tasks.

Try to cook beans that taste like those she put on the table. Bake a cake like the one she took to the Church Social. Or put out an eighth of a mile clothes-line of clean and starched garments from a very full hamper of very much soiled clothes. And while she was doing the wash she kept the baby quiet, answered the telephone, dismissed a book-agent, and at the same time got dinner ready for the menfolk so that everything would be just right and on the table, ice cold or piping hot, when they come in from the hayfield, tired and hungry, at noon.

The farm woman's motto may have been, "I'll have to put off 'til tomorrow what I can't do today," but she could cram just about as many completed tasks into a day as there were flakes in a box of rolled oats. There were two eight-hour days in her every working day, seven working days in every week, or at least six-and-a-half, fifty-two weeks in her every year—or maybe fifty-

three, for the week before Christmas might well count two. I knew women on farms who hadn't been away from their homes for a week's vacation in as many as fifty-three years.

Day in, day out, that was the life of the country woman. She came about as near being a living example of perpetual and effectual motion as one might find.

This is what her day's work might have been:

Arise at 4 or 4:30 A.M.—some get up earlier, but few farm women later than 5 A.M. even on Sunday or in the wintertime. Dress, make the fire; go after a bucket of fresh water, cut and bring in some extra stove wood, feed the chickens and give them water, slop the pigs, and clean up around the back door, all while the stove is warming up.

Back to the kitchen, turn the damper, put more wood into the stove, put on water to heat for cereal and coffee, slice the meat; sift the flour, mix the biscuits, cut them out, and put them in the pan ready to shove into the stove as soon as the pesky oven gets hot.

Chances are that the wood is green (green wood is easier to cut), or the wood may be wet. The stove may be one of the cussed kind that won't draw—there are fewer good stoves in country kitchens than you imagine. And a contrary cookstove can make one madder than anything on the farm unless it be a roguish old sow. So if the housewife has a poor stove, or if the wood is green or wet, she may have time to hustle about and

shuck and silk a few ears of corn or peel potatoes and get those on to cook while that stove is getting around to fever-heat.

In those days some farmer's wives were still "doing business" on one of those flash-cooking little box stoves—I suppose they called them "box" because they are so near the size of a shoe box. When a woman with a large family had a stove like that, she had to cook one thing at a time and that undone well, set it off to get stone cold while she put on something else to cook.

A woman who can be patient with a stove like that in rushing times like these, and when an impatient farmer and hired man are waiting for breakfast—a woman who can be patient with a stove like that with wood like that, should be taken right on to Heaven before the stove gets cold, but she rarely is. By the time breakfast is done she has to start dinner.

There may be interruptions, such as a neighbor calling to say that the cows had broken over into his cornfield, and would we please come and get them out. Cows know, somehow, the most inconvenient time to go a-rouging. And an old sow is almost uncanny in timing her rooting under the fence. She always picks a rainy, mean-weathered day.

People who declare in favor of toast and coffee—merely that and nothing more for breakfast—haven't pitched hay from sun-up 'til sun-down, milked and fed, both before and after that. It takes a marvel of a man down here in our section to pitch hay from dawn 'til noon on toast and coffee.

So if you're going to follow this farm family through the morning, you'd better put your feet under a real farm breakfast table. Pour plenty of cream into your coffee, and put in two heaping spoons of sugar—then bow your head. I am thankful that my people, “Bible Belt” people, still remember to be thankful three times a day, at least.

Now, help yourself to a slice of ham. Roll up your sleeves and open a steaming fragrant fluffy biscuit, and soak it well with gravy, red-eye gravy, right out of the heart of the ham. Now how about some fried chicken? There's wooly gravy with that. Soak those biscuits well.

Then the farmer's wife will say, apologetically, “I fried a little bacon and a few eggs for them that don't like ham or chicken.”

Help yourself to rice, fried corn, or grits or oats, or fried potatoes. Do you like fried apples better? Or apple sauce? Or pear preserves, or jelly?

She passes around the golden pone with ball, cake, or brick of butter, then a jar of honey or a “stand” of good thick, but bright, sorghum molasses. You may like to mix your butter with your honey or molasses, just as the children do—surprising how children know what's best—and lift it gently with spoon or fork from plate to biscuit, and sop it all up together, and cut the biscuits well soaked with butter and syrup into eating sized pieces.

Have another cup of coffee, or try some spring cooled sweet milk, or home-churned buttermilk. There are fruits in season—fresh fruits, grown on the farm.

And now, if you've finished your breakfast, you may sit back and watch the farmer's wife go about her morning's work. If a man, you may push your chair back, reach over and get a toothpick, rise stiffly, and stalk out to the front porch. Or you may draw your chair up behind the kitchen stove, lean back, take out your odorous old pipe, fill 'er up, strike, light and let 'er go.

If a woman is suspected of "toting" a pipe in her pocket (unless she is a mountain Granny, who is permitted special privileges) she would be disgraced for life. That's one of the hamperings of femininity—but I am only saying all this to put off the dishwashing. Who could possibly feel like washing dishes after eating peach pie soaked with thick cream? It has always been hard for me to believe we get energy from food. I don't seem to—not dishwashing energy.

MILK ON HER SHOES

We need to rake those dishes off, stack them up, and feed the dogs and cats. While we think of it, we'd better take some bread out to crumble to the little chickens. It's time to turn them out. So we'll leave the dishes stacked until the morning's milking is done. The farmer's wife likes to get through milking early, because flies pester the cows so bad later in the morning,

and because only a steam boiler is hotter to work beside than an old cow's flank on a sultry day.

Milking done, the milk is strained and taken to the spring house. As she comes back to the house she brings the cream for the morning's churning. Often I could get a chance to look over the newspaper or an occasional magazine while I sloshed away at the cream in the old stone jar with the cedar lid and dasher. I always liked the stone jar churn better than the cedar one that Grandma Ussery had passed on down to us because the stone jar didn't have brass bands to be polished, and it didn't leak if left in the sun without water in it. Besides stone was easier to keep clean.

OFF TO SCHOOL

We won't have time to churn now though. There are lunches to fix and children to get off to school. "Mama, where's my cap?" "I can't find my pencil anywhere. Oh, yes, I need a new tablet too this morning." "Have you seen my reader book? I know I left it here on the table last night." "Mama, please sign my report card. You'll have to write my excuse for being absent too." "Hurry up, we'll be late!" "Please, don't put that in my lunch. It's not good cold." "Oh, I don't want any lunch, I'm not hungry." "Mama, do you have another nickel? I've got to pay my class dues." "I need a quarter to pay on the new basketball." "Mother, I just know we're going to be late and you haven't written my 'scuse yet."

They're off! No, they're not. Come back here, Son, and wash your ears. Just look at that rim of dirt around your chin. Why, Sister, you've not even tied your shoes! Would you start off to school that way?

It's a wild scramble, this going to school, and it happens 160 to 180 mornings a year. It's bad enough to have to hustle about and get them ready to go, but the mother who has to get ready herself and take them to school, well, she simply doesn't get the dust out of the corners from September 'til May, and never gets caught up with her patching.

At last we'll have to get back to those dishes, I suppose. But let's get it over as soon as possible, for this farm woman will have to spread up the beds, brush the floors, and rush out to the garden to gather and prepare vegetables for dinner. She'll get dew on her shoes, if she's early enough, and probably dew in her soul. Her shoes will get dry, but let's hope her soul never does.

When she gets back from the garden, she'll stir up and rekindle the fire in the stove, and if she lives south of the Mason-Dixon Line, she'll put the old black-iron dinner-pot down next to the fire, half fill it with water, drop in a fat chunk of salt pork slashed criss-cross (or a piece of hambone) and then start snapping beans. After the meat has boiled awhile, the beans are dropped in; two or three hours more of boiling, then potatoes are peeled and placed on top; then a few pods of okra—they make the beans taste better—an onion, or two, and last some

broken roasting ears and some tender young squash are put on the tippy-top to cook in the steam and drip their juices down to blend with those of the other vegetables.

While the beans are boiling, the dessert is made. Perhaps a peach cobbler; a cottage pudding with sauce; apple dumpling, sugary, buttery, and truly very juicy; or it may be gingerbread with whipped cream or cheese, or cherry or berry pie. But it will be good, you can bet!

She may fix up a few extra dishes, too, such as coleslaw, creamed sweet potatoes, candied apples, corn pudding, or some other surprise. And she'll set the bread to bake; corn pone, muffins, biscuits, or rolls. And coffee or tea or both.

And, of course, there's that churning. That's not to be overlooked. She may have to wash out some of the children's school clothes, or press some, or patch some. There may be small children to keep an eye on, too. Or toes to tie up. Or a visiting neighbor who drops in for a minute but stays an hour.

There will still be plenty for the farm wife to do, even when the noon meal is over and those dishes are washed. Supper comes around by and by, but not before the children are in from school—starved, as usual. There are special jobs, too; canning, sewing, sick-nursing, gardening, house cleaning, and flowers to work with—always flowers.

To witness the variableness of farm life one needs only to follow the activities of the farm wife and her husband. Together they make up a team that serves from time to time as butcher,

baker, electrician, undertaker, doctor, engineer, nurse-to-man-and-beast, financier, architect, fence-fixer, woodchopper, haymaker, seamster, teamster, plowboy, cook, launderer, gardener, mechanic, toymaker, land-saver, forester, food preserver, shepherd, swine feeder, milkman and maid, chick-raiser, turkey-chaser, butter-maker, thresher-crew, landscape artist, painter, mason, carpenter, cellar-digger, kindergarten specialist, adolescent adviser, a community leader, wise parent and grandparent, general manager, specialist in dozens of vocations and avocations—and just as many other things as you care to mention.

Farm life is as variable as the weather. Sometimes as glorious, sometimes as miserable, and usually less talked about. We take it all in stride. We rarely consider ourselves (even the busy, always efficient farm mother) as classed with “skilled labor.” To the census taker we are still “women of no occupation.”



Spring Cleaning

Spring Cleaning is an intangible something that gets into a housekeeping woman on any unexpected occasion between the middle of February and the middle of June.

It upsets the entire household; turns the house itself inside out; moves the bureau where the cedar chest used to be, and replaces the bed with the wardrobe.

It takes the rugs out and tents them on the clothesline and fills the fresh spring air with the winter's dust they held. It takes the pictures down and places them back foremost against the wall on the front porch or face down on the grass in the side yard. It takes the curtains off the poles, soaks and shampoos them, and washes the blankets, the woodwork, and the what-not bric-a-brac.

It is the time of year when good housewives attempt to assert their superiority over the elements, spring mud especially. They try to take Old Man Winter dirt by the horns and give it a thorough shake-down and shake-out.

It is the housewife's way of working the winter "humor" out of her blood. Like the old time dosing of sulphur and molasses, although she hates it, she endures it and she wouldn't miss it for anything.

One strong point against Spring Cleaning is that it always comes at a time of year when a housewife and her family might be enjoying to the fullest that no-account, don't care, let-me-rest sort of feeling which is the very essence of Spring Fever. And when Spring Fever Time clashes with Spring Cleaning Time, what a struggle there is!

My strong complex against Spring Cleaning must have begun very early in life, but it reached a climax, I remember, when I was about ten years old. I was in the fourth grade, and doing Long Division. Arithmetic was then, as it has always been, one of my pet abominations.

Long Division and cube roots were classed in my mind along with castor oil, quinine, and ipecac. Nevertheless, I had worked out my dozen or more difficult problems and had “proved” them. They were that exasperating kind that wouldn’t come out even—always a “remainder.” I had left the neatly folded arithmetic paper with all its answers and proofs on Mama’s room center-table with my books, pencils, and other school paraphernalia, and had gone upstairs to bed.

Next morning, even before I had crawled out of bed, the Powers That Cleaned had decided it was time to begin. They had begun in that very room! By the time I was ready for school, the pictures were off the wall, the curtains were down, the carpet was up, and the center table nowhere to be found. My poor arithmetic paper was never seen again.

I plodded to school with premonition. There was stark fear in my heart and weakness in my knees. Arithmetic was first class to be called and, of course, I was requested to read the answer to the first problem.

I told the teacher honestly that I had lost my paper. Of course, she didn’t believe me. She had heard that excuse too many times before. She impatiently sent me to my seat, kept me after school, and gave me a demerit (my first).

Do you wonder that ever after that I hated Spring Cleaning? And demerits?

It is not merely arithmetic papers, well worked and proved, that disappear during that perennial chaos. It is so many of the

comfortable handy things we're used to. And those things that don't disappear are moved from their regular places.

Throughout the summer I am looking for things I had before Spring Cleaning. And I no more than get settled comfortably again, and get my belongings all fixed handy so I know where they are, until it's time for cleaning again.

I've never been able to see what housekeepers get out of it. It seems so much ado about so little. If you've ever noticed it, the housewives who are most radical about spring cleaning are the ones who never let dust and litter accumulate in their houses anyway. Houses like that don't need spring cleaning, but women like that need to Spring Clean.

Besides all the worry and hard work and misplacing and inconvenience, there is almost always considerable embarrassment connected with house cleaning time. I've noticed that as soon as the house-cleaner gets all the curtains down and puts them to soak, and as soon as all the family portraits are on the front porch, and the chairs, tables, bed, and bureaus are in the front yard—just as soon as she gets the rugs all h'isted up on the clothesline, and ties up her head and takes her beating stick in hand—in will walk someone, usually the preacher!

And as surely as she moves the guest room furniture into the living room and the kitchen furniture into the dining room so she can have those rooms papered and floors painted—just as surely, in will walk Cousin Matildy for a week's visit, or just

to spend the night. The Scriptures might have said: As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest, so is company at spring cleaning time.

It is indeed a terrible time of tearing up, taking down, lifting, shifting, scrubbing, scouring. And it is a season that is dreaded by every respectable housewife for 350-odd days in the year. Yet no respectable housekeeper would miss it.

The house cleaning “bug” bites even me. At any time after January it is likely to strike. Although this perennial fever, this irritating itch-to-clean in its acute form usually strikes most good housekeepers in April, I argue with myself in this way: I can’t spring clean in April, because by that time I’ll be reveling in garden fever; in March I’ll be taken up with little chickens; in May I expect to come down with a light form of turkey poults (not pox, and not quarantinable).

So it just seems I’d better tackle my spring cleaning ogre in February. Then I’ll have time to recover and rest up during March, April, and May. Of course, I realize that the ordeal will have to be repeated several times—after Locust Winter, Dogwood Winter, and Blackberry Winter. But I usually choose to begin on some bright day in February, groundhog winter permitting.



Florence-by-the-Day

So, early some Monday morning each February, with step-ladder (borrowed), wall broom (also borrowed), scrub brushes, scouring powder, old rags, elbow grease, and Florence-by-the-day, I started doing my housewifely duty, making an old fashioned house-cleaning campaign, the kind that Mama used to make and the kind to which Grandma Jones was chronically addicted.

I belong to the front-to-back school of thought regarding spring cleaning, meaning I like to begin at the front of the house and work the dirt toward the back door. There is another school of thought, which begins in the kitchen and winds up with everything on the front porch. I can't abide that type of cleaning. I tangled with a cleaner of that kind once. She started with the kitchen sink and worked toward the front of the house; I started with the guest room bed and worked toward the back, and we deadlocked by the divan in the living room.

Fortunately, Florence and I agreed as to procedure, so we began our spring cleaning upstairs in the closets and drawers and boxes where I stored away the things that "might come in use again in seven years." We'd take out all those things that were kept from year to year, and each year there was a general discarding and another general putting away.

During each Spring Cleaning ordeal, I'd pick up from the bottom of a box a little piece of green painted wood. It was part of a toy merry-go-round that Jack loved when he was three,

and beside it was the front wheel and handlebar of a worn-out kiddy car. I didn't discard. I just wrapped them up and put them back in the box, knowing as I did so that it wasn't the sensible or practical thing to do. Neither the wheel nor the green splinter of wood would come in use in seven years, or seventeen.

In the stack of books and papers were some of the themes I wrote in sophomore days. One was marked in red: "Unsatisfactory. Twenty-one errors. Recopy." I didn't discard that. Also, on this shelf of papers I'd find letters which some precise young ladies had written to my husband in the years before he became my husband. They are dated. I had no misgivings, and I did not discard those either.

In a shoebox, wrapped in soft paper and a piece of old cloth, I'd find "Boots," Margaret's last doll. Around her were packed the garments that the little mother had sewn so carefully: the plaid apron with its organdy ruffle, the dress of yellow and black checked gingham, complete even to buttonholes. (I remembered Margaret's making that while she convalesced from chickenpox). Then there was a white dress with a black monogram, and a pair of perfectly made pajamas with matching negligee, and a black taffeta evening dress exactly like Margaret's own first one.

When I'd look at Boots, where the paint had worn off her fingertips and cheeks, and think of the nights when her painted head had lain on the pillow beside Margaret's tousled one; when I'd look at all those saved-back scraps intended for doll dresses,

it seemed that the dust got into my eyes, or the wind coming in through the open window was giving me a cold. Anyway, I'd tell Florence there really wasn't any need of throwing away any of the stuff in that closet. So we'd just put it back and go on to the rest of the house.

So we'd work from the guest room, through the hall, through Jack's room, another hall, and Margaret's room. Then to the downstairs bedroom, hall, living room, yet another hall, and then dining room and kitchen. The old-time Colonial was built in ell-shape, with plenty of room: plenty of halls, plenty of floor space, window space, and wall space to clean in each room, so don't think that the cleaning was as easy as the mere telling of it.



Finally the Kitchen Stove

One particular Spring Cleaning will always stand out in my mind. Our old house and I had been wrestling together for 26 years, two months, and five days to see which one of us could wear the other out. Now, on the ninth day of the 27th annual spring cleaning it looked as though the old house was about to win.

I was always afraid spring cleaning would be my downing. Each year I try to postpone it as long as possible, and this year I might have put it off until after "blackberry winter" if

Margaret's soldier-husband hadn't gone on bivouac and allowed her a brief visit home. Margaret is such a good house-cleaning help that I couldn't bear to see so much woman-power sitting around knitting, and there was opportunity for spring cleaning.

Fortunately, Margaret and I agree as to procedure, too. So on the second day of her homecoming we began. It took eight days of double hard work for both of us and all the help Dad could spare from his farm work to get us through. But at last, on the morning of the ninth day, we could survey the results of our toil with satisfaction; everything cleaned but the kitchen stove. The china closet had been dusted, piano polished, floors waxed, freshly iron curtains hung, and all fairly well done. Finally came that kitchen stove!

We realized that this year the stove and pipe were unusually logy with soot. During the farm labor shortage we had been forced to burn a bit of coal to save stove wood. And as taking down a stove pipe is usually a messy job anyway, we put newspapers down all over the kitchen floor to catch the flying soot.

Then began the dismantling: Dad put a stool on a table and climbed up; I put a stool on a chair and climbed up; Margaret generalized and directed from the floor. The pipe came down in two parts. Dad carefully handled the heavier horizontal piece. I just as carefully took the perpendicular pipe with the elbow.

Margaret opened the southwest back door which had been bolted against the strong March wind, and we proceeded outward, Dad in front, me trailing.

We had done a neat job. I looked back as we neared the door and remarked: “We’ve never spilled as little soot on the floor as we have this time.”

Dad turned to survey the perfection of our accomplishment. As he did so he tilted that heavily laden stovepipe, which he carried at shoulder level, so that the outside end caught the full impact of that south west wind.

Swoosh!!!

My face, head, shoulders—all the world that I could see—went into immediate blackout!

Later I found that this blackout had included to a certain extent the piano keys, the cups in the china closet, the guest room bed spread, the clothes in the wardrobe, all of our carefully washed and painfully ironed curtains! That soot went everywhere!

Did you ever try to sweep soot? It does itself into such pesky rolls and balls—the kind that have to be gently persuaded, not smeared by sweeping or dusting in the usual manner.

So, on the ninth day of the 27th annual spring cleaning, it really looked like the old house was winning. And it was time for Margaret to go home.

I washed out the dust cloths, shook out the broom, oiled the mop, sat down for a good cry, and started again.



Ode (Owed) to Spring

Another blessed scourge of spring that comes in deluge form is the recurrent onslaught of seed catalogues. We'd no sooner get the Christmas cards put away before those bright, enticing reminders from enterprising seedsmen began to pack the mailbox. We'd try to cast them aside, hide them behind the stack of glass front envelopes, or the mid-winter sales announcements, but the thought kept coming up: "If the catalogues come, can Spring be far behind?"

Then, some lifeless January morning or afternoon (like as not it would be on a Sunday) we'd take pencil and scratchpad in hand, settle down in a comfortable chair before the fire, and stack the seed catalogues beside us.

It's the blood of Old Grandpa Adam, that first gardener, I suppose! At any rate, by the time the fire had died down, we'd have hollyhocks in bloom by the garden fence; a row of Canterbury bells nodding alongside; giant dahlias, rainbow-colored gladioli, "bigger and better" snapdragons, pastel asters, fluted poppies, shy little candytuft, mignonette; and all the others, blooming and blowing in unison on that bare brown spot outside the kitchen door.

The vegetable section of the seed catalogue then would march like a bright colored circus parade before our armchair reviewing stand beside the fire. The parade would be led by asparagus and artichoke, on down through the alphabet. Page

after page, they'd pass, row after row, in appetizing array. Even spinach looks good in catalogue pictures and dream gardens.

It is a sort of mania, I suppose, this love for green and growing things, but do not be distressed. There are cures, several of them. A flock of scratching hens can cure almost the "ravingest" patient. And what they can't accomplish cutworms, squash bugs, and beetles can carry on. Late frosts, broiling sun, droughts, and hailstorms are all effective, but scarcely any cure is permanent. The patient is likely to have another attack of arm-chair gardenitis next January when the seed catalogues come again.

I'm so glad that an all-wise Providence decreed that garden-planting time come in the spring. Just as we are all worn out with winter, winter, winter, and it looks as though we'll be completely submerged by weather, there will come one of those gorgeously balmy days which impel us to plant our gardens.

The air seems so new in the spring, and the winds so soft. The rain and sun seem child-like in their gentleness. All that I ask on days like those are more dirt to stir, more seeds to sow, longer days, a stronger back, and the ability to forget that in each row some weeds will come and the mid-summer sun will be hot and sickening.

Not only does the making of a garden put gravel into one's shoes and grime under one's nails. It also puts something intangible and very satisfying into one's soul. It relaxes taut nerves and restores a tired spirit in a way nothing else can. There

is strength in the earth, but one must come close to Earth to get it. One must put knees on the sod and fingers in the clods, or lie down on the soft grass to feel that strength.

One needs, too, to plant seeds, to let those dry little pellets of latent life slip through one's fingers in order to know what living is like. Earth still is Mother of all.

In the spring human notions likely turn to thoughts poetic. The true and would-be poet breaks out in stanzas and sonnets, all hedged in by meters, rhyme, or rhythm. He calls the result of his efforts "An Ode to Spring" or some such title.

But a busy country woman can't be bothered with complicated matters like those three "R's," rhyme, rhythm, or reason; she just has to say what she thinks and let the accents fall where they may. Being a genuine 116-pound, milk-on-my-shoes, hay-in-my-hair country woman, and being better acquainted with "please-remits" and "will-be-dues" than with couplets or quatrains, I'll pay my tribute with an acknowledgement of obligations and name it simply:

Owed to Spring

By Lera Knox

A billion blue violets pushing through Earth's leafy blanket to
see what this thing called Spring is all about.

Small, lady-like anemones blowing on a sunny south hillside.

The distinct odor of onions or wild garlic in the old blue cow's
milk.

Hens cackling about the barn, in the chicken-yard, and under
the house.

A frisky brown wren trilling in the plum tree near the back
door.

Lambs dancing on a ditch-bank, daring one another to fall in.

Calves romping like rabbits about the pasture and nuzzling up
to their mothers to be fed.

And yes, the swish, swish, double swish of a lamb's tail when
its owner is at dinner.

A flush of goldenbells showing beauty near the chimney
corner.

Redbud trees coyly putting on spring dresses of fuchsia-tinted
chiffon.

Pussywillow catkins trembling in the wind, as though frightened
by the budding dogwood twigs nearby.

Hillsides greening; plum buds swelling and peach trees showing
pink.

The smell of burning trash as yards are cleaned, the whiff of
wood smoke from burning tobacco beds—those beds that
look like fiery snakes creeping across the hillside at night.

The rhythm of the sower's stride and the swing of his arm as he
scatters seeds to the breeze.

MORNING AND EVENING WERE A FULL DAY

Mr. and Mrs. Redbird's quick darting in the fence row, the bluebird on the gatepost and the mocker high in the hackberry tree.

That host of golden daffodils blowing and swaying in the breeze.

A whiff of trillium in the air, the "bite" of Indian turnip.

Freshening green moss on a rocky ledge.

Helpless baby chicks needing crumbled bread and buttermilk.

A bed of old-fashioned blue and pink Roman Hyacinths; lilac buds daring frost; sudden showers and Easter snow.

Perky bonnets, new shoes, bright coats and dresses.

The feel of crumbly clods of garden soil, the fragrance of the fresh turned earth.

The cuddlesomeness of baby rabbits whose nursery bed has barely escaped the plowshare.

Ribbons of pressed earth across a cloddy field, meaning that corn is planted.

The wobbly jointing of winter grain, giving promise of daily bread.

Sunfishing, grunting, squealing piglets—hope of next year's sausages.

Lettuce, mustard, radishes and onions, all chopped up together and "dressed" with vinegar and hot ham gravy—and hoecake, of course.

Men and boys digging fish bait in damp places, women planting flower beds.

GOODNESS GRACIOUS, MISS AGNES

Squirrels cleaning up their winter stores; and the racket of a jaybird orchestra.

Hog jowl and turnip “sallet” topped off with poached eggs and homemade pickles.

Easter lilies, rhubarb pies, fried chicken, strawberries, asparagus tips, house-cleaning, spring fever, apple blossoms, cold winds, rosy dawns, and tulips.

Blue skies and gray; and as Mark Twain said, “One hundred and thirty-six kinds of weather inside of twenty-four hours.”

All things made new; the slow growing and cautious coming-out of all those patient things that wait beneath the sod all winter.

Life, Nature, Humanity—all at their best.

For these things and many more I am indebted to Spring. It is a debt that I can never repay. I may not say my thoughts in rhyme, nor even in proper words, but I can enjoy and appreciate Spring’s gifts and be her grateful debtor, and Spring never sends a bill.