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ASTOR, LENOX AND
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No. 1

WITH WASHINGTON AT VALLEY FORGE

By W. Bert Foster

CHAPTER I

Unwelcome Guests at the Three Oaks Inn

ALL day the strident whistle of the locust had declared for a continuation of the parching heat. The meadows lay brown under the glare of the August sun; the roads were deep in powdery yellow dust. The cattle stood with sweating flanks in the shade of the oaks which bordered the stage track, and although the sun was now declining toward the summits of the distant mountains, all nature continued in the somnolence of a summer day.

A huddle of sheep under a wagon shed and the lolling form of a big collie dog in the barnyard were the only signs of life about the Three Oaks Inn. Mistress and maids, as well as the guests now sheltered by its moss-grown roof, had retired to the cooler chambers, and Jonas Benson, the portly landlord, snored loudly in his arm-chair in the hall. Out of this hall, with its exposed beams of time-blackened oak and its high fanlight over the entrance, opened the main room, its floor sanded in an intricate pattern that very morning by one of the maids. Across the hall was the closed door of the darkened parlor.

Had Jonas Benson been of a more wakeful mind this hot afternoon, it is quite likely

that this narrative would never have been written. But he snored on while behind the closed door of the parlor were whispered words which, had they reached the ears of the landlord of the Three Oaks, would have put him instantly on the alert.

The year was 1777, a fateful one indeed for the American arms in the struggle for liberty—a year of both blessing and misfortune for the patriot cause. Within its twelve months the Continental army achieved some notable victories; but it suffered, too, memorable defeats. It was the year when human liberty seemed trembling in the balance, when all nations—even France—stood aloof, waiting to see whether the star of the American Colonies was setting or on the ascendant. The British army, under Howe and Clinton, occupied New York. Washington and his little force lay near Philadelphia, then the capital of the newly-formed confederation. New Jersey—all the traveled ways between the two armies—was disputed territory, disturbed continually by a sort of guerilla warfare most hard for the peacefully-inclined farmers and tradespeople to bear.

Spies of both sides in the great conflict infested the country; foraging parties, like

A RAMBLE IN EARLY SPRING

By Julia McNair Wright

GOING out for a walk on some March morning, we find the air soft and warm, the skies of a summer blue, the water rippling in every little runnel. We look about, half expecting to see a blue-bird perched upon a fence post, a robin stepping among the stubble. The stems and branches which appeared dry and dead all the winter have now a fresh exhibition of life. We can almost see the sap creeping up through their vessels and distributing vigor where it goes.

Let us go to the woods, to some sunny southern slope where maples grow.

Turning over the light, soft earth, we shall find the maple seeds that ripened last autumn and are now germinating. The seeds of the maple are in pairs, which are called keys. They look more like little tan-colored moths than keys; the distinctly-veined, winged husk is very like the narrow and veined wings of many moths.

These seeds are winged in order that they may be blown abroad on the wind and plant new forests farther afield. If they all dropped close under the shade of the parent tree few would live beyond a year or two.

Where the wing-like husks come together there is a thickening of the base of each into an ear-like lobe, holding a seed. The wrapping of this seed softens, the seed enlarges as the embryo within it grows, the husk is pushed open, and slowly comes forth the baby tree, composed of two leaves and a stem. These two leaves, although very small, are perfect and even green in the unopened seed.

They are soft and fleshy; in fact, they are pantries, full of food, ready for the weak little plant to feed upon until it is strong enough to forage and digest for itself. Everyone knows that babies must be carefully fed on delicate food until they get their teeth. The baby plant also needs well-prepared food.

Between the two leaves is a little white stem. The two leaves unfold, and in a few

days the air and sun have made them bright green. The stem between them thrusts a little root into the earth; this root is furnished with hairs. When the root is well-formed and the two seeds have reached full size, a bud has formed in the axil between them.

This is the growing point of the new tree. This bud presently opens into a pair of well-formed maple leaves.

As these leaves increase the seed-leaves diminish; the plant is feeding upon them. The ascending stem presses its first pair of leaves upward, forms between them two more, and then two more, and thus on.

Small branches are formed by the end of summer, the seed leaves are exhausted, and the plant is doing its own work.

Under the trees in March we find many interesting examples of seed-growth. The feeding or seed-leaves of the young plant are called cotyledons. All flowering plants have cotyledons; the plants whose leaves have dividing or radiate veins, and whose stems are woody, or, at least, not hollow, have two cotyledons; grasses, reeds, corn, and other grains, lilies, bamboos, all plants with hollow stems and the leaf-veins parallel have one cotyledon, while pines and trees of their class have from three to twelve cotyledons, always set in a circle.

The seeds, the new plants, or seedlings of any variety are very numerous. This is needful, as they are subject to many disasters. They may be eaten by animals or birds, withered by too great dry heat, devoured by worms, frozen or ruined by over-much shade. If plantlets were not very numerous the varieties of plants would presently die out.

When the March winds shake out the leaf-buds and the seeds in the ground begin to stir with strong life, we are led to think of the plant's host of enemies.

These enemies of the plant will not all begin their work in March, but they are enlisting, drilling, and furnishing their regiments for the season's strife.