

## MAY 6

One wonders sometimes about whether there are any consolations in our enforced idleness and imposed isolation. My current daybook author, Edwin Way Teale, whom I have quoted before, would have said yes. In the volume of his daily notes I am reading this year, "The Circle of the Seasons", 1952 (Dodd/Mead), he wrote for May 4th, a little observation titled, "The Shyness of Nature".

"Nature is shy and noncommittal in a crowd. To learn her secrets, visit her alone or with a single friend, at most. Everything evades you, everything hides, even your thoughts escape you, when you walk in a crowd."

Teale, a justly famous naturalist writer and photographer in his day, who certainly knew the bustle of New York and the demands of his money-making work, did not fail himself in his private life. That is, he went religiously, I don't think it wrong to say, out on his walks around Milburn Pond, on the south shore of Long Island (now a small nature preserve), and while he restored his soul daily, he recorded what he found. Our great good fortune is that as a trained naturalist and dedicated writer, Teale was also graced with a prodigious vocabulary to describe his minute observations, a ready sociableness with strangers, and the gift of having the right literary quote or reference in mind when he needed it. The note for today includes this, "...yellow-green flowers, like bursts of fireworks, spray out on the sassafras twig ends...where dogwood bracts have been losing their green, day by day, they are now white, now nearing that whipped-cream brilliance of their mid-May glory. Pear blossoms are gone and cherry trees are already beginning to look tarnished and threadbare...the pink-white cumulus clouds of blossoms are beginning to billow up on the apple trees."

His prose is what a friend of mine long ago would have called luscious; if words were fruit his would burst on one's tongue like pomegranate.

The descriptions are so precise that it allows his prose to be rich without cloying, and his enthusiasm is infectious. Makes me want to run outside and SEE something.

Doesn't this suggest to you that observing is a learned skill, one requiring both cultivation and desire? And isn't the best way of education a matter of introducing or quickening a desire to appreciate something as thoroughly as possible? We have to learn to look and want to see. To that we must add a mind hungry for vocabulary and the dedicated to crafting similes and metaphors that will sharpen our perceptions and enrich our communication.

I can't do justice here, but I would also put our human gift to make music as an utterly authentic and expressive response to the world, and it can produce the most sublime experience of unity with the world and new associations and connections between pieces of creation.

We have the Spring season unfolding around us, out of doors and perhaps on our window sills ( Dorothy and I have orchids, to which in my room I add a passel of african violets). There are birds to see—this year we have the fattest robins in creation out behind our house, positively elephantine in their proportions; how they fly is beyond me. You and I have a world to observe, and doing so is calming, affirming, comforting, and helps ground us in the natural processes we participate in by the very fact of our being, and which include the current novel virus.

For the virus we're dealing with is a thing of nature, as much a part of the creation as we are—struggle against it though we rightly do—and holding that firmly in mind keeps us focused on the real situation. One doesn't rage at a hammer because in the course of driving a nail it may hit a thumb that is unwisely close to the job. That's silly. It is not an infringement of the thumb's rights for it to be sensible about a swung hammer. You can't reasonably make demands of a disease-causing entity, you have to adjust yourself to it because you and it are in the world together—and as far as it is concerned, your unique wonderfulness, and how precious you are in your family and church community, matters not a farthing: you're a host, food, and an environment to prosper in. All you can do is get out of its path until you can resist its onslaught.

The medieval world had a wonderful phrase to describe the concept of our being enmeshed in the processes of the world: "natura naturans", nature naturing, nature doing what it does. Nature unfolds the glories and joys of Spring, it brings forth entities that will kill us if we are not careful. So rejoice, give thanks, look and see this world of ours, being careful, patient, stout-hearted, and hopeful.