

NATURE NOW

Winter Is Siesta Time for Nature

By LYDIA KING FREHSE
Special Writer for The Birmingham Eccentric

Now in mid-December we approach the winter solstice. Just as June 21 brings the longest and brightest day so December 21 brings the shortest and darkest. The northern sun rises late, makes its brief journey low on the horizon and often sinks from sight before it sets in a bank of clouds.

I have just returned from a walk in a favorite woodlot, one which I frequent during the spring when it is lush with the delicate tracery of ferns, the color and fragrance of ferns, the color and patterned greenery of a canopy of leaves overhead.

A light snow covers the ground. The lowing skies, the empty trees, the subdued plumage of winter birds all are a study in half-tones.

The dried berries of spice bush and sassafras cling to the bare branches. Only the age-old lichens and mosses make patterns of living green on the rough bark of the tree trunks.

Everywhere bare boughs reveal the empty nest of a summer tenant. Some things, like the village of roosting meets in the tall marsh nearby and the big leafy homes of the squirrels high in the trees, are still in evidence.

Others need close scrutiny. Many belong to summer visitors who have taken wing for a vacation in the tropics. Although they leave no name plates, he who companions with our feathered friends can pick out some telltale identification mark for each.

Dead leaves float on the water of the slow-moving stream. Here in the hollows the earth smells dark and musty. Already the slow rot of decay is heralding the accumulated debris of summer's growing. This nature is at work all winter long silently preparing her seed beds for another year's sowing.

As I follow the curve of the stream the sycamore is easily the most conspicuous tree in sight. In summertime it stands out pat-

terned with bright sunlight. In winter it looks alive against a darkening sky.

THE BLOTCHED and spotted look of the trunk is due to its particular growth habits. The tree grows rapidly and as the old bark splits it sloughs off in thin plates and irregular patches showing the color of the new bark.

This may be gray, tan or yellow-green, but at a distance it gives to the trunk a mottled brightness which livens the winter woods.

All about my feet lie the large sycamore leaves, thin and crumpled. The curious dents have given the tree its name of "button wood". Now these faint impressions on their long stems like Christmas-tree ornaments.

Here they will bring all winter long until they have thoroughly dried out. Finally the balls break into a fluff and each of the many seeds accompany by its own bit of down will float away on wind or water.

THE HISTORY of the sycamore leaves have left a fossil record reaching back some 100 million years when it, together with such trees as the magnolia and laurel, made up the fruit of our present-day wood forests. Strangely enough these trees grew on what

is now Disco Island, 300 miles north of the Arctic Circle on the west coast of Greenland. At that time this area had a temperate or semi-tropical climate, say the scientists.

In Colonial America, the track of the pioneer followed the mottled life of the sycamore into the rich river bottoms where this tree grew to giant proportions. He found its wood hard and tough and impossible to split.

OF A CIRCLE from its enormous holes he made the primitive wheels for his ox carts. Its hollow trunk, when cut into suitable lengths and supplied with a bottom, made stout bog's heads for his grain. Later its wood was used for such articles as washing machines, barber poles and lard pails. Today much reduced in size and number, it is used to make crates

and boxes and, because it can be much hacked without splitting, for butcher blocks.

But darkness comes early and I must leave the woodlot to the Society.

small creatures to whom it belongs. To the burrowing ant and beetle, to the hibernating wasp, to the flocks of circling crows, to the small rodents and burrowing mammals seeking shelter from the winter's cold. In the nature of things all creatures must rest and so the year's living settles to its close.

Society deadline is 3 p.m. each Tuesday.

December 16, 1954 THE BIRMINGHAM ECCENTRIC Page 3



MRS. CARL RICE POURS FOR THOSE AT WOMEN'S GATHERING
Mrs. Ira Brownell waits as Mrs. Lawrence Heintz is served. (Eccentric Photo).

Red Shield Keys Decor for Tea

A red shield and forest green tablecloth were setting for teatable decorations at the Pine Cone tea of the Birmingham Women's club last week at Baldwin Public Library.

After hearing Marshall Fredericks explain work in his famed sculpture studio and viewing illustrations of his activities on the screen, members went from the auditorium to the adjoining smaller room for tea.

At the tea table were Mrs. Carl Rice, president, and other officers. HER AIDES WERE Mrs. Harriet Smart and Mrs. William Scherer of the Club's Modern Living arrangements were by Mrs. Ira Brownell's committee.

Earle Steele of the Fine Arts unit, Mrs. Ralph Main and Mrs. George Johnston of the Literature group, and Mrs. Harry Showwood and Lucy Burdy of the American Home group.

Mrs. Heintz introduced Fredericks, whose studio is housed in art works, he and helpers at work in his studio, the quarrying of marble in an Eastern location, and the hoisting and assembling of Fredericks' work on the Veterans' Memorial building in Detroit.

The gifts that members laid about the tree on the stage, as played by Mrs. Matthew Cammereri and her committee, were taken that evening to the Oakland County Infirmary by Mrs. Cammereri and Mrs. Walter Moreland.

Guests of Mother

Arriving in town next week will be Mr. and Mrs. F. Roeder Taylor of Aurora, Ohio, formerly of Birmingham. They will spend the holidays with Mrs. Taylor's mother, Mrs. Harry S. Starr, of North Woodward avenue.



Mrs. Frehse

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