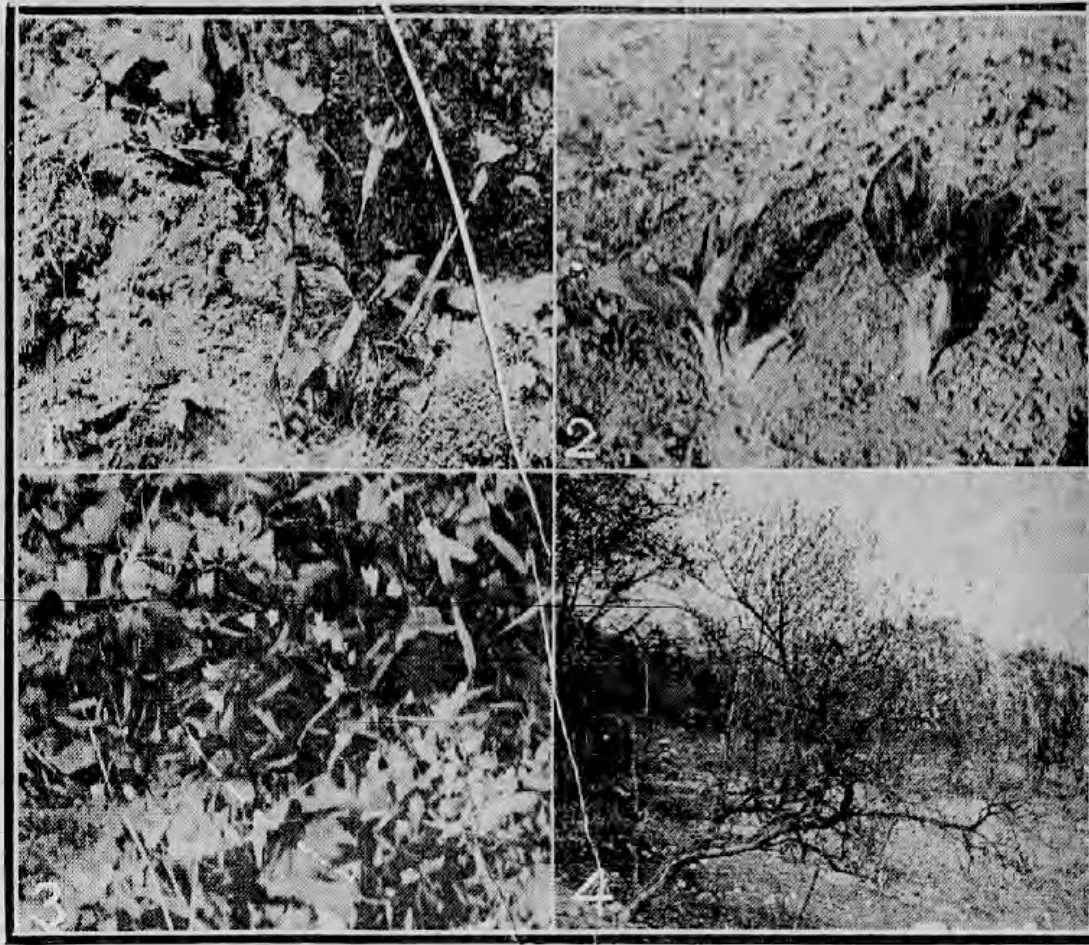


Plum Blossoms, Skunk Cabbage and Modest Jack-in-the-Pulpit Among May Arrivals That Please Lover of Life in the Woods



1. Jacks-in-the-Pulpit. 2. Skunk Cabbage. 3. Spring Beauties. 4. Plum Trees.

FROM a distance thickets of the thorny, still leafless, wild plum now seem covered with snow-flakes, the illusion being due to myriads of white blossoms. We find the resultant red and yellow, somewhat puckery fruit not unpalatable, if the birds do not forestall us in harvesting it.

And the hard or sugar maple becomes conspicuous by reason of its drooping sprays of cream colored flowers, swaying on threadlike stems. The hard maple is certainly our finest deciduous tree. When grown in the open it forms a compact domelike head, which affords refreshing shade from summer's heat. The leaves usually turn a bright yellow in the autumn. This tree will prove an ornament of stately beauty for the street or lawn, and a beneficent testimonial to the wisdom of the planter, calling forth the gratitude of countless passersby, long after he is dust.

To turn to herbs, the skunk cabbage is one of our earliest spring flowers, for it literally thaws through the soil of the icebound marshes. You will have a greater respect for Dame Nature's ability as a packer, if you take apart the leaf bud made up of many leaves tightly rolled one within another and smaller and smaller in the center. The bud expands into a clump of large leaves, from which the name cabbage is derived. The disagreeable odor is attractive to flies, which find a shelter from the cold within its purplish-red, hoodlike spathe, and pay rent

by pollinating the flowers. The spathe—the shown part of the inflorescence—is merely a large leaf enveloping numerous minute flowers set on a fleshy axis.

It is always well to get at the roots of things. If you dig deep down into the muck you will discover a stout subterranean stem, from which spring many roots ringed like angleworms. These roots have contracted like muscles, thereby forming the rings and giving the stem a deep, safe anchorage in the earth. This is only one of the many instances of self-burial by a "pull on the stem."

More agreeable and better known members of the Arum family are Calla and Jack-in-the-Pulpit. In the case of the Jacks the upper part of the fleshy flower axis is naked and is used as a support of the roof of the pulpit, or spathe. The small, simple flowers at the base of the axis are without floral leaves and are usually separated, namely, some of the Jacks bear only pollen producing flowers; and others, which in course of time will develop seeds. The leaves of the Jacks are branched and made up of three leaflets. The seed producing Jack usually bears a pair of these branched leaves in place of the one carried by the pollen-bearing Jack.

For the individual producing the seed must manufacture food for storage in them as well as in the onion-shaped, subterranean bulb, which gives another name—Indian turnip—to the plant. The Indians used the turnip,

after pressing out the poisonous sap, as a farinaceous food. Jack the Jester displaying insignia of motley in the stripe of pulpit-roof has, of course, the reputed wisdom of former times; but you'll get no drippings of it, unless you frequent the sanctuary of the wilderness. But even as a preacher, he cannot refrain from some foolish pranks. No one would be astonished to find, as is sometimes the case, two Jacks fraternally occupying the same pulpit; but an observer was doubled up with laughter to see a Jack holding forth in two united pulpits. Only the student, or one versed in wood lore, would recognize Jack, when he first pries through the ground, in the form of a slender, slightly curved, sharp-pointed bulb, with a protective sheath mottled like snake skin. Again, but few connect the last stage of seed bearing Jack with the crowded bunch of bright red berries so common in late summer.

It is a far cry from the Arum to the Portulaca family, to which the much beloved spring beauty belongs. The spring beauty is local, but it brightens large patches of low woodlands, which it chooses for an abiding place. Spring beauty of Minneapolis (Claytonia virginica) is a low, slender plant with narrow leaves which come from a dark brown triangular tuber imbedded in the earth. The flowers are dainty white bells striped with pink, and in masses thickly carpeting the earth are a joy to the eye.

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