

### The Song of the Pine Forest.

The pine forest is a wonderful place. The pine trees stand in rank like the soldiers of some vast army, side by side, mile after mile, in companies and regiments and battalions, all clothed in a sober uniform of green and gray. But they are unlike soldiers in this, that they are of all ages and sizes; some so small that the rabbits easily jump over them in their play, and some so tall and stately that the fall of them is like the falling of a high tower.

The pine trees are put to many different uses. They are made into masts for the gallant ships that sail out and away to distant ports across the great ocean. Others are sawn into planks and used for the building of sheds; for the rafters and flooring and clapboards and other woodwork of our houses; for railway sleepers, scaffoldings, and hoardings. Others are polished and fashioned into articles of furniture.

Turpentine comes from them, which the artist uses with his colors and the doctor in his medicines, which is used too in the cleaning of stuffs and in a hundred different ways; while the pine cones and broken branches and waste wood makes bright crackling fires by which to warm ourselves on a winter's day.

But there is something more than just this I should like you to think about in connection with the pine forest; for it, like everything else that is fair and noble in nature, has a strange and precious secret of its own.

You may learn the many uses of the trees in books, when men have cut them down or grubbed them up, or poked holes in their poor sides to let the turpentine run out; but you can learn the secret of the forest itself only by listening humbly and reverently for it to speak to you.

Nature is grander and more magnificent than all the queens who have lived in sumptuous palaces and reigned over famous kingdoms since the world began; and though she will be very kind and gracious to children who come and ask her questions modestly, and will show them the most lovely sights and tell them the most delicious fairy tales that ever were seen or heard, she makes very short work with conceited persons.

She covers their eyes and stops their ears, so that they can never see her wonderful treasures or hear her charming stories, but live, all their lives long, shut up in their own ignorance, thinking they know all about everything as well as if they had made it

themselves, when they do not really know anything at all. And because you and I want to know anything and everything that Nature is condescending enough to teach us, we will listen, to begin with, to what the pine forest has to tell.

When the rough winds are up and at play, and the pine trees shout and sing together in a mighty chorus, while the hoarse voice of them is like the roar of the sea upon a rocky coast, then you may learn the secret of the forest. It sings first of the winged seed, then of the birth of the tiny tree; of sunrise and sunset, and the tranquil warmth of noon-day; of the soft, refreshing rain, and the kindly, nourishing earth; of the white moonlight, and pale, moist garments of the mist, all helping the tree to grow up tall and straight, to strike root deep and spread wide its green branches.

The voice sings, too, of the biting frost, and the still, dumb snow, and the hurrying storm, all trying and testing the tree, to prove if it can stand firm and show a brave face in time of danger and trouble. Then it sings of the happy springtime, when the forest is girdled about with a band of flowers; while the birds build and call to each other among the high branches; and the squirrel helps his wife to make her snug nest for the little brown squirrel babies that are to be; and the dormice wake from their long winter sleep, and sit in the sunshine and comb their whiskers with their dainty little paws.

And then the forest sings of man—how he comes with an ax and saw, and hammer and iron wedges, and lays low the tallest of its children, and binds them with ropes and chains, and hauls them away to be his bond servants and slaves.

And, last of all, it sings slowly and very gently of old age and decay and death; of the seed that falls on hard, dry places and never springs up; of the tree that is broken by the tempest or scathed by the lightning flash, and stands bare and barren and unsightly; sings how, in the end, all things shrink and crumble, and how the dust of them returns and is mingled with the fruitful soil from which at first they came.

This is the song of the pine forest, and from it you may learn this lesson: that the life of the tree and of beast and bird are subject to the same three great laws as the life of man,—the law of growth, of obedience, and of self-sacrifice. And perhaps, when you are older, you may come to see that these three laws are after all but one, bound forever together by the golden cord of love.—*Selected.*