

A GROUP OF AIRSHIP SEEDS

Ready to start on the great adventure

Of the many methods of seed dispersion that of using the wind as carrier is one of the most common and most effective.

In the picture opposite we have an interesting group of such airship seeds. The centre is occupied by a spike of the great willow-herb, or fireweed, whose forty long pods contained about twelve thousand seeds. On a dry day it is a pretty sight to see these pods splitting open, their four slender divisions curving quickly but gently outward into the form of a cross, and the imprisoned down instantly fluffing out as if delighted to find freedom. The seeds lose no time in starting on their momentous journey, but eagerly commit themselves to the first passing breeze. The launching of these tiny, crowded airships is in open situations usually attended by few mishaps, and away they sail, each freighted with a potential fireweed that may by and by bloom in splendor on some distant clearing. These seeds are extremely light and buoyant. Twelve hundred of them weigh less than one grain, and in a still room, experiment showed that on the average the seeds took forty seconds to fall eight feet. The slightest upward breath of air sent them soaring, and in the open there is no doubt that they rise to great heights and travel long distances.

On the left of our picture are opened milkweed pods. Each held about fifty large, brown seeds. These pods split open along one side only, and at first no silk is seen, for the flat seeds overlap one another like the scales of a spruce cone, but as drying progresses the elasticity of the compressed hairs pushes up and out seed after seed to be whirled away by the wind. The weight of each is more than one hundred times that of a fireweed seed, yet the sustaining power of its large and beautiful parachute is such that it has one-fifth the buoyancy of the lighter seed.

To the right are five disintegrating cylinders of the long-fruited anemone. While still intact, all the seeds—about two hundred and forty to each—are on the outside, arranged in well-ordered spirals with the wool tightly packed within. When the expansive pressure of this drying wool finally bursts the neat cylinder, the crinkly wool separates into little tufts with a seed