[From "Broad and Brown Thoughts" in Phil'a Press.]

ICE is mightier than iron. It modelled the mountains, scooped the valleys, channeled great rivers, bedded lakes and engraved all the lovely lines of innumerable landscapes. Frost is our most beneficent earthly blessing. It first made gravel by disintegrating rocks, and then covered universal barrenness with productive soils. Snow has done vastly more for human welfare than gold. All historical nations and every valuable element of civilization will be found only where the winds of winter blow—between arctic rigidity and tropical lassitude. The pulse of the earth never ceases to beat, but abounds most in vitality when to the superficial it seems most inert. Many members of the vegetable kingdom, as mosses and lichens, an innumerable and exquisite multitude, torpid in summer, bloom in winter only and produce their fruit. Fairmount Park in the middle of January more abounds in beautiful life than in the middle of July. Each single tree hangs a gallery of pictures, in most diversified forms and charming tints—colors not rare but rich—a collection transcendent above all our boasted academies. Every bit of bark, the size of your thumbnail, especially on trunks and boughs facing the bleakest skies, is rich with a paricular species of infinitesimal flora a thousand varieties of which have been scientifically arranged and only a small portion have yet been in complete order classified. It is in this realm alone and at mid-winter, that we have graphic and plastic art, pictures and statues, closely associated and endlessly combined. Put the tiniest piece of surface bark under a microscope and a whole day is too short for a single specimine. A million lichens, pictorial gems on a silver ground, tinted with every changeful hue, lie in the palm of your hand, not one of which is the same as a year ago in form or expression, for the Divine artist retouches each picture into lovelier lines, as each succeeding winter shows.

With the mosses it is the same. The emerald of their hue is never so bright as when the weather is most severe; their multitudinous stems are then most fascinating in their individualized erectness and the ramifications of their commingled arms. The current of their life is most transparent and abounding when grosser rivulets are hidden in turbid silence, bound in icy chains.

As with the wonders that glorify winter, from top-root to top-bough of every tree, on every inch of surface exposed to frosty atmosphere, so is it more especially at the myriad points of every limb, branch and spray, where all the latent forces of nature are bursting through. There are not only more winter blooms in our common parks than there are flowers in summer, but vastly more common leaves. Now is the time to study God's wonderfulness in the symmetry and variety of denuded trees; their tints as well, remembering that all Divine painting is done only in water-colors. But you will not see a naked tree aright, unless as you stand gazing perhaps knee-deep in snow, you behold it loaded with foliage, and melodious with zephyrs in harmony with singing birds. Not a leaf can be there next July that is not now set on the life-throne in January. And not only is all summer latent there in embryonic leaf, flower and fruit, but these are enclosed in a whole harvest of winter leaves which must be gathered on melting snow. Their use then terminates and they are destined to fall before the warmth of spring, as their guarded successors must yield to autumnal blasts. Be grateful if, in languid ease, you may be drawn to view summer foliage, but give special thanks that God has made a more rugged season in which health may be fortified and happiness enhanced by a closer study of nature's supplemented wonders—winter leaves. Then to you, as to Linnæus, she will appear greatest in her least productions. Inferior to oaks in majesty of form, they are not less important than grander forests, and are intimately related to all gigantic things in the universe. The great whole is indissolubly connected through the smallest articulations, so that the germination of the minutest linchen, the growth of the simplest moss, impervious plate-armor of winter leaves and the lung system of summer foliage, is by our Father, who made all worlds and seasons, inseparably linked with the sublimest astronomical phenomena.

Nothing in this world is single;
All things by a law divine
In one another's being mingle.

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