

The following article was written by the Methodist pastor, Robert "Fighting Bob" Shuler, assigned from 1920-1953 to Trinity Methodist Church in Los Angeles. The article had appeared in "Bob Shuler's Magazine" in April, 1927. Bob had returned to his birth place in Virginia to preach a revival in near-by Bristol, Tennessee. He was traveling with Trinity Methodist friends of Los Angeles when he wrote this splendid portrait from memories of his Virginia youth.

### Springtime and God

The dogwood blossoms will soon be luxuriant in the woodlands of my childhood, for the God of the wide open reaches is touching with springtime life His wonderful out-of-doors. The gray squirrels are already feeding on the opening buds. The bluejay and the thrust are surveying the timber lands with an idea of a twig-built house and the open mouths of their nestlings as the summer comes on. The field mice are searching for a few dried straws left in the wheat fields from the winter's grazing of the hungry cattle. The meadow lark is on the wing where the fields are growing green, for spring is all aglow in the hills where, as a child, I hunted the first blue violets that lifted their faces toward the sun.

How a man can be an atheist in the springtime is beyond me. For God is everywhere as the flowers unfold and the winter's frosts turn to dew-pearl under the great eye of the April morning. God walks in the woodlands as the sap rises. To right and left are the proofs of His resurrected life. The "Johnny-jump-up" proudly lifts his beautiful head. The sarvis tree is abloom. The oak and the chestnut are tasseled out as on some festive day. The cucumber tree is the haunt of the honey bee and the great poplars are putting forth their leaves. God walks on the dew-wet mosses and smiles as the virgin forests reflect His joy of living.

The meadows also sing His praises and proclaim His majesty. The daffodil and daisy come creeping from their beds within the sod. The brooks that leap and froth and hurry on are full of the joy of spring. The horny-heads are biting. The perch are ready for the barefoot lad and his fishing pole. It is spring. The thorn tree has become a bower of green

and the briar thickets are white with the flowers that prophesy the blackberries of July.

Sometimes I grow hungry for those hills. Yes, I would like to see them in the winter, white with the snows of December. I would like to skate upon the ice-covered ponds again. I would like to behold the gold and red, the sear and purple of the autumn. I would like to see the grain in the shock. I would like to see the apple orchards laden with their fruit. Surely I would like to see the full tide of summer in my mountains once again, the clover meadows ready for the mower, the tasseling corn, the teams coming in from the fields as the sun is setting. But, most of all, I would love to go back and walk through the woodlands in the full tide of spring. I would love to turn off barefoot again and carefully pick my way through the stubble of last summer's reaping, going after the cows at milking time.

For I learned of God and His power to give life in those mountains as the spring flowers came pushing up to smile in the face of the pilgrim. My mother told me of that God as she cut the dead wood from her rose bushes. They were the wild and yet beautiful roses that came bursting out with a glow of refreshing just before the summer, and then, folding their show tents, they dropped their petals until the coming of another spring. My mother said they were God's roses. She told me that the giant trees were His, that He made them, that He tended them, that He loved them and me. She told me that the woodlands were His flower-beds and that the beauty of the forests was His beauty interpreted in that loveliness that always finds its way to the woodlands of the old Blue Ridge with the coming of the spring.

And it was there I found Him. It was there I came to love Him. It was there I heard His voice in my inner consciousness, speaking to me of life and its tasks, of opportunity and responsibility. It was there I felt His constraining leadership toward the place I humbly occupy in His great fields of service.

A few years ago I went back to the mountains and the hills. I went back in May. I went back when the fields were in bloom. I knelt where the little red strawberries were crimson. It was at the head of my mother's grave. The pines were sighing for their hearts are ever broken. I promised God that spring day to keep straight ahead. I shall never live

again in those mountains, but if God shall will it so, I hope He will turn His city over to those who love the city when I come home, and move me out somewhere on His eternal slopes. I want to live eternally in His out-of-doors. I want to walk through His woodlands in that eternal springtime that shall be.