

**SILVER FIELDS, AND
OTHER SKETCHES OF A
FARMER-SPORTSMAN**

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Silver fields, and other sketches of a farmer-sportsman by Rowland E. Robinson

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ROWLAND E. ROBINSON

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A FARMER-SPORTSMAN

BY

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SILVER FIELDS
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A FARMER-SPORTSMAN

SILVER FIELDS

AFTER many downfalls of snow by night and day, everything of lesser height and sheer uprightness than buildings and trees is buried in universal whiteness. Sometimes the snow flutters down and silently alights like immense flocks of birds. At other times it descends as silently, but like the continuous falling of a gray veil shutting one in from all the world lying farther away than his nearest outbuildings. Another snowfall comes blown by howling winds in long slants to the earth and whirled and tossed along the fields blurring their surface in a frozen crust.

Then comes a day when the wind quits buffet-ing the snow from this side and that and stands still, debating which way it shall blow next, while the sun burns into the cold blue sky's eastern rim, runs its short course over the dazzling northern fields, and burns its way out behind the glorified western mountains. When the sun is highest the air bites cheeks and nose and fingers with a sharp chill, and one feels its teeth gnawing his toes through his boots if he does not bestir them. At nightfall the smoke of the chimneys leans toward the North Star and by the next morning the wind comes roaring up from the south, armed with

swords and spears of cold that no armor of wool or fur can ward off, and from every vantage-ground of ridge and drift stream the white banners of snow. Then clouds come drifting across the sky, first a few, then so many that they get into a jam against some star or mountain somewhere to the northward, and in a few hours all the blue is clogged with a dull gray mass. As the later coming legions of the wind arrive, the temper of their weapons is softened and their keen edge blunted. The snow loses its crispness and takes the imprint of a foot like wax.

We have a midwinter thaw, the traditional January thaw a little belated; and presently it begins to rain pellets of lead out of the leaden sky, rain that has none of the pleasant sounds of summer showers. There is no merry patter on the snow-covered roof, no lively clatter on intercepting green leaves nor splashes of dimpled pools; only windows and weather-boards resound to its sullen beat. When, after some hours of rainfall, the snow has become softened down to the earth, so that when one walks in it his tracks show a gray, compacted slush at the bottom, the wind lulls and veers to the northward and patches of blue are opened in the world's low, opaque roof, windows through which the sun shines upon some fields and mountain peaks, making them whiter than the whiteness of snow.

The air grows colder, coming out of the north; but if the advance of Boreas is slow and cautious, and he sends before him his light-armed skirmishers, the snow is frozen so gradually that it turns to a crumbly, loose mass, with a thin, treacherous surface, where nothing much heavier than a fox, if not as broadly shod as with snowshoes, may go without vexatious and most tiresome labor. If the change of temperature is sharp and sudden enough to freeze the water held in the snow before it has time to leach down to the earth, we are given a crust so firm that it is a delight to coasters and all walkers and runners on the snow.

It is now no toil but a pleasure to go across lots. "The longest way round" is not now "the shortest way home." The fields give better footing than the highways. The side of the highways is pleasanter to the feet than the two grooves the horses and sleighs have worn in its center in all their two months' going and coming. There is a silver stile along every rod of every fence, and you may walk anywhere over the buried gray wall or rail fence at your ordinary pace, and sit down to rest on the top of the stakes where last July, when the daisies were blowing, the bobolink sang, higher than you could reach. Can it be that summer ever blossomed here in these frozen fields? How long ago it seems; and yet we are not much older!