

Morning View
27 March 1957

Hello Mr. McCarthy,

Last Saturday was the first day of Tobacco Bed Spring. It, like Indian summer, is an indeterminate period, neither starting nor ending on predestined dates, and of a most variable duration. Last year it was crowded into three breathlessly perfect days. This spring it is obviously going to be made up of good days picked out from amid stretches of bad weather, for, after all, its arrival date and life span are governed solely by weather.

I think I must have named it Tobacco Bed Spring, for I cannot remember ever hearing anyone else so designate it. In fact, most people take no cognizance of it at all, as a small, distinct, very delectable slice of the year. It is, in brief, those few days in early spring when burning tobacco beds send up little trickles and puffs of smoke from hillside and valley floor.

Burning tobacco beds before sowing the seed is eminently practical. Properly done, it destroys weed seeds and insects to the depth of some few inches, thereby decreasing the foes with which the frail, fussy seedlings will be forced to contend. The fire must be of just the right volume and duration. Insufficient heat fails to bring proper destruction to the pests, and too much fire bakes the lumps of this hostile Eden Shale soil into little red bricks of the consistency and hardness of Vermont granite.

I know all about the latter condition. My first tobacco bed, after a nice, fat, enjoyable fire, was paved to the depth of several inches with well baked little lumps of earth of a most uninviting redness. Their indestructibility is attested to by the fact that, to this day, beyond the tobacco patch, they remain heaped as I raked them off the bed, defying alike winter snows and freezes as well as summer downpours.

I will not mention what happened when I planted the seeds. I was well armed with UK bulletins on tobacco growth. These bulletins assumed a certain basic knowledge which I did not have. They were Fifth Grade readers, so to speak, and I needed a primer.

All of which has nothing to do with Saturday. I was not burning a tobacco bed, but busied myself transplanting Dianthus in the flowerbeds on the slope above the pond.

The sunshine touched the sheltered hillside with sufficient warmth to be reflected back from the thick grass around the bare soil of the beds. The breeze, rich with the scent of wood smoke from tobacco bed fires, was so slight as to be scarcely more than air seepage. Half a dozen different early spring blooms sparkled in the beds, the iris reticulata standing out in patches of strong blue.

I was lazy about my planting. For that one day at least, the enchanted