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REMARKABLE BEHAVIOR OF A VETERAN WHITE OAK

ELIZA FRANCES ANDREWS

It is not the great age and size of this tree that claims our attention here, but its surprising defiance of natural conditions during the unprecedented drouth of the past summer which has been so fatal to vegetation throughout the Southeastern States, and has, in many cases baffled the efforts of man himself to save his crops and herds and keep the machinery of his great industries running. When it first attracted my attention some four or five years ago, "Time's effacing fingers" had already left their marks upon it, as indicated by the following record, made at the time in my note book; "It is now in a very decadent condition, and among the undergrowth around it there are no signs of progeny to take its place." It continued to decline slowly, the foliage gradually becoming paler and thinner until the great drouth came—and then, behold! a miracle.

About the middle of September, 1925, when the drouth had reached its climax, I made a visit to this Methusaleh of the forest, expecting to find it dead, or dying, but imagine my surprise at seeing it covered with luxuriant foliage of the rich deep green color indicative of health and vigor, and a fine crop of seedlings on the ground around it. In fact, this tree appeared to be thriving under conditions that were destroying vegetation all around it. The two girls in the foreground of the photograph are four feet and a half, and five feet tall respectively, and the contrast between their size and that of the tree may give the reader a fair idea of the cyclopean dimensions of the latter.



Its location on the border of an open pasture in the valley between two steep hillsides, was a very favorable one before the drouth, but at this time the pasture was a desert, and the bed of the little stream which had watered the valley was as dry as a brick.

While the deep ramifications of its root system may account for the survival of this forest giant, it does not explain its sudden rejuvenation in health and vigor under conditions that were killing healthy trees all around it. Not being an expert in such matters, the only explanation that I can suggest, is that competition for the scanty supply of moisture in the soil had been greatly reduced by the death of other competitors, and possibly, enriched by a greater proportion of chemical nutrients which under normal conditions would have been absorbed by the trees that had died. But this is merely a supposition of the writer, who would like very much to know the opinion of other readers of *Torreya* who are better qualified to form a correct one.

ROME, GA.



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