

Nature Study and Elementary Agriculture

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NATURE-STUDY AIMS.

Educationists are generally agreed that the chief purpose of education is "the formation or development of right character." What is character? The Standard Dictionary says that character is "the individuality which is the product of nature, habits and environment." One writer defines character as "an inward grace of which reputation should be the outward and visible sign." Recent events have recalled the statement "there is a character of ages as well as of nations."

We now ask the question, what determines character? There are two important factors, heredity and environment. Heredity is an inheritance from Nature and is fixed. Whether man was specially created or has developed from the ape, by evolution we have risen to the present level. Man's habits, which he inherits, and all that he is are the result of the struggle for existence with his environment, which has been Nature. In body, mind and soul he has his roots deep in that environment of the race during millions of years.

Natural environment has been a very potent factor in the past. Has it not possibilities of great influence in the present and future? The business of education therefore is to place the child in such environment—or place such environment about the child—as will, reacting with heredity, result in the best development of character. In addition to natural environment, the most important artificial parts of an environment which will act best in the direction of right character are the home, the school, the teacher, and the course of study. The ideal home has often been pictured. It and the school should be in the midst of Nature. The course of study should be firmly grounded in the things of Nature. It should be so planned that the pupil will find "books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything." The teacher should be willing and able to make use of Nature constantly in forming the characters of the children placed in her charge. She will not be **able** and **willing** unless keenly sympathetic with Nature. She should be able to say with Byron:

"There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
There is Society where none intrudes,
By the deep sea, and music in its roar."

The great **need** is the **teacher**, by whose activity and sympathy the child will, through the school and a close touch with natural environment, develop true character. "But character, like Heaven, is not reached by a single bound. We build the ladder on which we rise, and we mount to its summit round by round."