



Best Things

A Department Devoted to Life, Literature and Education.

"The best things are nearest; breath in your nostrils, light in your eyes, flowers at your feet, duties at your hand, the path of God just before you. Then, do not grasp at the stars, but do life's plain common work as it comes, certain that daily duties and daily bread are the sweetest things of life.—R. L. Stevenson.

An Interpreter of Life.

To many people it appears that poetry is nothing but a dream, and "of such stuff as dreams are made on"; a thing apart from life and all life's interests, a something that may be eliminated from the mental bill of fare—just as bonbons may be eliminated from the more natural bill of fare—without loss. Hence, these people never read poetry. That this idea is not the truth of the matter, however, has been the universal opinion of those who have given to subject the deepest and most unbiased thought. On the contrary, the conclusion has been arrived at by these students that true poetry, as well as its correlated subjects, music and art, is an interpreter of life itself, and that the language in which the poet expresses his thought or emotion is, in reality, the simplest and most natural in which that thought or emotion may be expressed in its entirety. Dr. Lyman Abbot, of New York, makes this aspect of poetry very clear in an admirable article, with which he prefaces a portion of "The World's Best Poetry," a publication recently issued, chiefly under the direction of Bliss Carman, the well-known Canadian poet. "The musician, the artist, the poet," says Dr. Abbott, "discover life which others have not discovered, and each with his own instrument interprets that life to those less sensitive than himself. Observe a musician composing. He writes; sings; he imitates; meditates; perhaps hums softly to himself; perhaps goes to the piano and strikes a chord or two. What is he doing? He is trying to express to himself a beauty which he has heard in the world of infinite phenomena, and to reproduce it as well as sensuous sounds can reproduce it, that those with duller hearing than himself may hear it also. Observe a painter before his easel. He paints; looks to see the effect; erases; adds; modifies; re-examines; and repeats this operation over and over again. What is he doing? He is copying a beauty which he has seen in the invisible world, and which he is attempting to bring out from its hiding, so that the men who have no eyes except for the sensuous may also see it. In my library is an original sonnet by John G. Whittier. In almost every line are erasures and inter-

lineations. In some cases the careful poet has written a new line and pasted it over the rejected one. What does this mean? It means that he has discovered a truth of moral beauty, and is attempting to interpret his discovery to the world. His first interpretation of his vision did not suit him, nor his second, nor his third, and he has revised and re-revised in the attempt to make his verse a true interpretation of the truth which he has seen. He did not make the truth; it eternally was. Neither did the musician make the truth of harmony, nor the painter of form and color. They also eternally were. Poet, musician, painter, has seen, heard, felt, realized in their own souls some experience of life, some potent reality which philosophy cannot formulate, nor creed contain, nor eloquence define; and each in his own way endeavors to give it to the world of men; each in his own way endeavors to lift the gauzy curtain, impenetrable to most souls, which hides the invisible, the inaudible, the eternal, the divine from men; and he gives them a glimpse of that of which he himself had but a glimpse."

Dr. Abbott marks a strong distinction between the true poet and the mere rhymer: "The poet must feel the truth, or he is no poet, but he must also have power to express what he feels in such forms as will create a similar feeling in his readers, or he is still no poet. Multitudes of women send to the newspapers poetical effusions which are not poems. The feeling of the writer is excellent, but the expression is bad. The writer has seen, but she cannot tell what she has seen; she has felt, but she cannot express her experience so as to enkindle a like experience in others. These poetical utterances of inarticulate poets are sometimes whimsical, but oftener pathetic; sometimes they are like the prattle of little children who exercise their vocal organs before they have anything to say, but oftener they seem to me like the beseeching eyes of a dumb animal, full of affection and entreaty for which he has no vocal expression. It is just as essential that poetical feeling should have poetical expression in order to constitute poetry, as it is that musical feeling should have musical expression in order to constitute music. Poetical feeling in unpoetical forms may be poetical prose, but it is still prose. And on the other hand, rhyme, however musical they may be to the ear, are only rhymes, not poetry, unless they express a true poetical life."

"Poetry is NOT COMMON THOUGHT EXPRESSED IN AN UNCOMMON MANNER; it is not an artificial phrasing of even the higher emotions. The higher emotions have a phrasing of their own; they fall naturally—whether as the result of instinct or of habit need not be considered—into fitting forms. The form may be rhyme; it may be blank verse; it may be the old Hebrew parallelism; it may be the indescribable form which Walt Whitman has adopted. What is noticeable is the fact that poetical thought, if it is at its best, always takes on, by a kind of necessity,

some poetical form. To illustrate if not to demonstrate this, it is only necessary to select from literature any fine piece of poetical expression of a higher and nobler emotion, or of clear and inspiring vision, and attempt to put it into prose form. The reader will find, if he be dealing with the highest poetry, that translating it into prose impairs its power to express the feeling, and makes the expression NOT LESS, BUT MORE ARTIFICIAL. If he doubt this statement, let him turn to any of the finer specimens of verse and see whether he can express the life in prose as truly, as naturally, as effectively, as it is there expressed in rhythmical form."

Advantages of Nature Study in Rural Schools.

It is a noteworthy fact that for a long time the courses of study in our rural schools have had but little reference to the lives of the pupils. While it is true that the pupils leaving school can read intelligently and write legibly and neatly; can compute accurately, and perform most of the common exercises in arithmetic with facility; can discuss readily the main historical events in English and Canadian history, and can give the geographical positions and importance of the civilized coun-

tries of the world, yet it is also true that, in spite of all this training, they show a woful ignorance of the things and the meanings of things that lie about them. The pupils have been living, to some extent at least, in an unreal world, in a world which was unrelated to their real lives. The things of the farm, roadside and forest, which would naturally be of the greatest interest, were untouched, and had little meaning. No wonder, then, that the children of the rural districts, who found nothing interesting in their surroundings, would come to think

more of the interesting things in towns and cities!

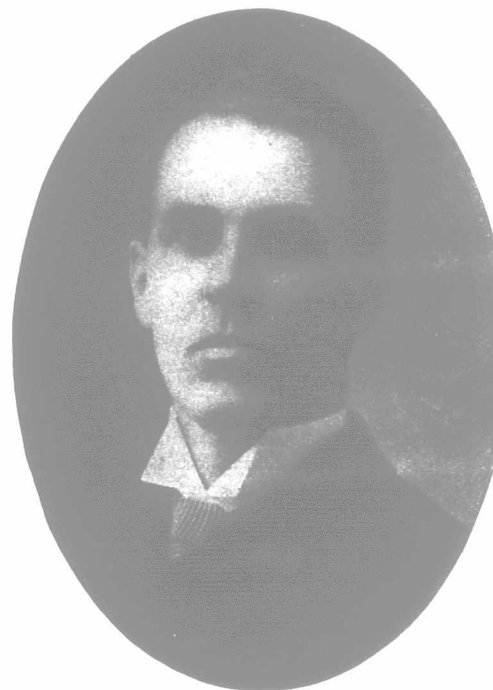
Nature-study under a competent teacher will AWAKEN AN INTEREST IN THE THINGS WITH WHICH THE COUNTRY CHILD LIVES. The plants, the animals, the soil, will be studied; the inquiring spirit will be fostered; and the child, in its own way, will become an investigator. In other words, the child will get into sympathy with its surroundings.

For many years our schools, apparently, neglected to note the fact that pupils had hands, eyes and ears, which required training as well as the mind. To a child trained at school to observe carefully, and to know the meanings of the things it sees, the root, the leaf, the soil, the moisture in the soil, the bird, and the insect, will no longer be sordid or unworthy of attention. When the child becomes a man, farming operations will take on a new meaning. Everything about the farm will have significance, and the farmer will realize that at every turn he is dealing with forces which require controlling, and which furnish scope for the intelligent use of his brain.

Moreover, the introduction of nature-study will bring the school into close touch with the home. The parents will take a greater interest in the work of the school, for they will soon find that the child at school is solving problems which are of vital interest to them in their daily work.

Again, the teacher will be able to teach more rationally than ever before. No doubt the courses of studies must be changed before he can hope to do his best work. The new knowledge which he gives to the child, will then be presented in terms which will link it to its past experience. It is a well-known axiom, in good teaching, that the child must see the new in the light of the old. And what a stock of experiences the child has on entering the school, for it has been going to nature's school for four or five years! The value of nature-study in school work lies in its power to hold the attention of the pupil involuntarily, and without attention there is no clear knowledge.

Nature-study is to be welcomed in our rural schools, for it will introduce a new spirit or method into the teaching. The nature-study method develops power, and power, as well as culture, is demanded in modern education. It will tend to do away with mere memorization and book-learning. It is a study of THINGS, not ABOUT THINGS. It begets an attitude of inquiry, which makes the child more self-reliant and independent, and neither the teacher nor the child will rest content until this spirit of inquiry is carried into the other studies of the school course, with the teacher simply as the leader or guide. When a teacher can properly assume this attitude of comrade with his pupils he can work wonders with them, and no one can pretend to estimate the influence of such a teacher, imbued with the



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