



A School Flower Club.

(By John Finlayson.)

Only a little shrivelled seed,
It might be flower, or grass, or weed;
Only a box of earth on the edge
Of a narrow, dusty window-ledge;
Only a few scant summer showers;
Only a few clear shining hours;
That was all. Yet God could make
Out of these, for a sick child's sake,
A blossom-wonder, as fair and sweet
As ever broke at an angel's feet.

—Van Dyke, The Builders.

Flowers! Flowers! the pretty flowers!
Are you to have a flower garden in your school? Do your pupils know how to rear a "tame" flower? Are they acquainted with the wild flowers? If not, dear teacher, your duty with regard to the child and nature study has been sadly neglected. To the child, the love of flowers is one of the earliest and most enduring of passions. We may learn something from Nokomis in Longfellow's Hiawatha. She was grandmother and teacher to him:

"Saw the rainbow in the heaven,
In the Eastern sky the rainbow
Whispered, 'What is that Nokomis?'
And the good Nokomis answered:
'Tis the heaven of flowers you see
there;
All the wild flowers of the forest,
All the lilies of the prairie,
When on earth they fade and perish,
Blossom in that heaven above us.'"

Here was an ideal teacher of nature. There was no dissecting, but a living interest in what these things did.

In order to bring the children into touch with their friends of the wood and field, a flower club should be organized at once, having for its motto, "How to know the tame and wild flowers." Get into the woods, become acquainted with the beautiful wild flowers.

The following plan may be found helpful before anything can be accomplished in the school-garden. Begin by asking the children: What flowers do you like best? Why do you like these better than any others? Other questions may be asked to arouse their interest. Let the information thus derived be a writing lesson. If any do not like flowers, encourage them to state the fact and let them give the reasons for their dislike as they are able. Next, have a composition lesson on what they know about cultivating flowers. Organize your club after you note the interest aroused in flowers, including every member of the class. Allow the children to elect officers as you would in any other society club.

After you have been successful in forming the club, have your school board vote supplies to obtain sufficient packages of seeds for each member of the club. Give each pupil a package of the seed of the flower which he or she loves best. Ask how many would like to take some seeds and see who can raise the best plant. Give a simple lesson and demonstration on the preparation of the soil, and the best way to plant. This should be done early, so that the plants may be well grown and in fine bloom for a flower "show" near the end of the spring term. The seeds should be planted and reared at home in flower pots. Have the pupils tell you about the growth of their plants from time to time while they are growing. Three or more prizes should be awarded at your flower show. The children should be given to understand that each must find out for himself, from books or parents, or anybody who knows, the best way to rear his plant. The object of the lessons should be simply the culture of the

tame flowers. Blanks should be made out on paper, by the teacher, for future reference, as follows:

TAME-FLOWER CALENDAR, 1913.

Flowers.	How obtained.	By whom cared for.
Roses		
Lilies		
Violets, etc.....		

In the above manner we cultivate thoughtfulness and power to reason, and initiate unconsciously into scientific experiment, directed toward tangible and practical courses.

When the wild flowers have come out, daily excursions should be made to the woods, either during the last hour of school, or after four. Begin by giving a few simple language lessons, to find out what the children know about the common wild flowers. Have them make lists of the flowers with which they are acquainted. The teacher should be well acquainted with the woods to be visited before a nature-study trip is attempted. The names of the most common plants should be taught the pupils as well as the characteristics that distinguish each. In order to do this, the flowers should not be touched by the fingers, but should be left entirely on the stalk.

"It is murder to dissect."

—Wordsworth.

No advanced work should be attempted by the teacher. Leave this for the High School or Collegiate Institute. What I mean by advanced work is the learning of the botanical names and difficult botanical terms. Fancy introducing a chicory flower or plant to a young child in the terms of a dead language, as "Cichorium intybus." To create the love of a flower in the heart of a child with some knowledge about trees, poisonous plants, and a little knowledge of horticulture, is the botany that should be required in the public school.

The following device might be written on the black-board:

WILD-FLOWER CALENDAR, 1913.

Date.	Name of flower.	Pupil who first finds it in bloom.
April 13...	Hepatica.	Mary Smith.
April 25...	Buttercup.	James Ross.
and so on until the board is full.		

Then the school club will copy the list into their study note-books.

To make the identification of a plant possible, do not take the whole plant to the school-room. Encourage the child to bring in descriptions, or only so much as will make identification possible. It is a distinct loss to have our rarest and most beautiful flowers so completely exterminated in the wild woods, and near our towns and cities, that few ever see them blooming.

It will not be too much to learn at least twelve plants a year by grouping, drawing, and writing lessons about them.

"Hast thou named all the birds—without a gun?
Loved the wood-rose, and left it on its stalk?"

—Emerson.

Such a nature-study course will enable the children to keep their eyes bright and wide open on their way to school. Besides this, it will give them life-long interests, acquaintances and friends.

But, perhaps, while the teacher is performing her or his duty in this noble work, the wary parent will thrust in a hasty demand at the teacher. He asks, "What good is derived from this nature

study?" Is the parent aware that a weed or plant is either his best friend or his worst enemy? Is it not of economic value to the farmer to know what plant to cultivate or what one to destroy? What will call forth a child's best activities or develop patience better than this study of flowers and weeds? What other occupations stand in such fundamental relation to life and civilization? All of these questions are worthy of serious thought before replies should be made. Finally, dear teacher and parent, begin when the child is young. Earliest impressions are the deepest. Fathers, parents, teachers, let us be up and doing! What we lack, let us provide for our children. Remember that the child is dealing with living, breathing flowers—not dead, inanimate things.

One of the most important objects of our present education is to train the child to think for himself when he is young. By a series of well-selected questions, this habit may be easily acquired. These questions force him to reason for himself, thus making the child more self-reliant, since education is child-training. Is not the child that is trained to think led at the same time to develop powers of industry, activity, and diligence, which should be the important virtues of our home and country? Activity is constructive. This activity of the child is now one of the underlying principles, or methods, of education. As a result, children are not allowed to grow up thoughtless, idle, and, therefore, dead.

Boys and girls rear plants for the sake of the flower. The flower seems to be the attractive part. Each pupil strives to see who will have the largest and prettiest one. Many fail. It is this throwing of the old plant away to rear better that develops patience in children. Thus, patience, carefulness, and faithfulness, in such a little thing as a flower, and the continuity of purpose, are all instilled unconsciously with preaching. The pupils love their flowers, as parents love their children.

This study of the plant and flower enables the child to express his views by models and drawings, as well as by writing. Reflective attention upon flowers is exercised and developed. By this method, the child discovers for himself the end, reflects upon their desirability, and upon their means to attain them. All of these require mental activities which must be deliberate, independent, and permanent.

No man yet knows how to rear any single plant best. The competitive element seems to be in the child. It brings into action every title of power to think, reason, investigate, and experiment. This becomes a lesson for the human race in learning the best cultural conditions for difficult plants of the same family. It represents a step from barbarism to civilization. The child, in this simple, easy, and natural way, has done more than anything else to uplift human life. I say, let the whole child play and delight in this study of flowers and plants.

On the mental side of education, the child's powers of observation are trained. He sees, or must see, the wonderful life-story of his plant from the seed, through root, stem, leaf, and flower, to seed again, guided by the direction of selected questions on the teacher's part. There is no book in the world which could teach him so much as this one plant so closely associated with his own thinking, feeling, willing, and doing. Observation is education.

In the education of the race, sound brain-tissue and mental powers must be attributed to "Dame Nature," a very old, kind, and useful nurse. When living in contact with nature, studying the

flowers, the child comes in contact with the other phenomena of nature. This change offers a relief to the mentally cramped and distressed pupil and teacher.

From an economic standpoint, it is essential that the child know what plants with their flowers are valuable to mankind, and what ones are detrimental. Laws have been formed to protect all useful and economic things of nature, as birds, game, fish, etc., while the evils of nature, such as insect pests, noxious weeds, bacterial diseases, and injurious animals, are nothing but a continual menace to public property. No man has the right to allow things to breed and grow upon his premises that would be an injury to his neighbor. The child must be trained to carry on the fight for the good, and against the bad, in nature, which should be entirely for human good.

Flower culture is a very ancient line of human interest. What is there in modern times that equals the hanging gardens of Babylon? We, as teachers in the public schools, do not expect to come up to this degree in the art; nevertheless, the child can be turned instinctively to the beautiful in nature to complete his satisfaction. A flower club in every school should fill and surround many homes and schoolhouses with the most beautiful things attainable. Within their minds, there should be instilled the spirit of creating and preserving the natural beauties of roadside, field, and forest, rather than that of ruthless destruction.

The love of right and the hatred of wrong depends largely upon the study of the plant and its flower. It is because of pure ignorance that a boy has little idea how much harm he is doing when he kills the birds or destroys the nest, and plucks some valuable or pretty plant. Any effort for the protection of property is ethical, and the moment the child takes this stand, he places himself on the side of law and order in his community. This ethical and social idea may elevate the moral and aesthetic tone of a household, for to rear a flower is an ideally ethical act.

Lastly, the study of the plants and their flowers will lay the surest foundation for religious character, because no one can love nature, and not love its "Author." As Prof. Hodge says, "The child that puts forth creative effort to make the world better, the child that plants a seed or cares for the life of an animal, is working hand in hand with nature and the Creator, and what higher religious development can we desire than that he become the 'reflected image of God?'"

Surely, a child that has nursed and cared for another living thing, though it be of a much lower order than himself, will be led more easily to guard and foster his own life. To observe and care for the living children of nature, such as beetles, butterflies, birds, plants, and their flowers, is a lesson that is a distinct step upward from barbarism to civilization.

Children welcome the opening of spring, with its bees, butterflies, and beautiful flowers. He is a bright boy who follows the seasons by its flowers. Through his close friendship with them, he proudly calls them his own. The swamps and the woods, the hills and the road-sides, are his especial domain. The impersonal love of flowers is one of the characteristics of modern poetry. The great poets of Canada and the United States have shown a profound appreciation of the incomparable wild flowers. I say again, "Go ahead and organize that flower club in co-operation with your school garden without delay." Do not hesitate, dear teacher, for the work ahead of you is ample and cheery.