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NATURE'S GAME OF HIDE AND SEEK

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HENRY VAN DYKE, in his "Essays in Application," says: "Many fine things have been said in commencement addresses about 'Culture and Progress,' 'The Higher Learning,' 'The University Spirit,' and other subjects bearing upon the relation of education to life. But the most important thing, after all—the thing which needs not only to be said, but also to be understood—is, that life itself is the great school."

"The whole framework of things visible and invisible wherein we mysteriously find ourselves perceiving, reasoning, reflecting, desiring, choosing and acting, is designed and fitted so far at least as it concerns us and reveals itself to us, to be a place of enlightenment for the human race."

Coming, therefore, into the interesting academy of Nature, man finds many problems challenging him, intricate problems, involving questions of vast use and help to all mankind. But behind them all sits Dame Nature, with a warning finger ever upon her lips, for she has taken a vow of silence, and from the olden days when Eden was first opened to the human race, she has watched with keen interest the game of hide-and-peek, that humans ever since the world was, have engaged in.

Millions of years have been spent in packing the heavens and the earth with problems for man; centuries have been consumed in the discovery of a few of these.

For example, think of the thousands before Watts who had seen a tea-kettle dance with steam for a partner, who never caught a hint of the mighty secret that was jauntily flaunting itself in their faces. Study this out, and by ascertaining how the power of steam revolutionized transportation and assisted labor and industrial life, the first inkling will be obtained of one of the many rich secrets which Nature hid for centuries from man, until one more far-sighted than his fellows got "warm," and discovered the secret of the steam engine and the power of steam.

Another problem which Nature set for man is, "How will you keep from freezing and starving?" Men solved the former for many years by using the trees of the forest for fuel. Yet down in the bowels of the earth were hidden vast coal beds, in the discovery of which was fulfilled one phase of the edict that everything shall be put under the feet of man. "See if you can find it!" and "What will

you do with it when you have found it?" are the two great lures of Nature's game. Find my coal-beds, my oilwells, my gold, silver, and copper veins, my marble and granite beds, my diamonds, opals and rubies. Much of interest will unfold in a study of the discovery of some of these things and how generations of men got "warm" following the game before the successful seekers were rewarded.

And so Nature goes on playing her game of hide-and-peek. Between the field of waving grain, which man learned to grow, and the loaf of bread, she set many a barrier. In the olden days men and women pounded the grain into meal by hand, and this primitive article of food was used in a variety of ways. Between the coquetting blossoms of the cotton plant, and the dainty muslin into which it is formed; between the fleece of wool and the web of cloth, she set door after door, double-bolted and barred, but man in due process of time solved the riddle and gave to the world clothing, until from a rude beginning has evolved all the intricacies and wonders of the sartorial art.

The human race at present is getting pretty "warm" over the discovery of aerial navigation. In some respects it has been solved, but not to that extent as to make it a safe and desirable way for general travel. Yet it is only reasonable to believe that this may come, for we cannot but believe that nature has many surprises, which are kept for generations yet to be—finer secrets for finer senses. Our grandparents learned to sail the ocean, but for their great-grandchildren is set the harder problem and greater glory of cloudward flight in the bird-winged spaces of the air.

The human race suffered for years, while in Nature's store-house was hidden the anesthetic, the use of which makes the much dreaded operation painless. Mankind waited for the coming of an Edison to link the whole world together by the chain of telegraphy and the telephone, while in these later days has been added the greatest of the trio, wireless telegraphy. These were marvellous secrets, hidden for centuries. Take up the story of their discovery; consider how many got an inkling of these mighty secrets hidden for centuries before the final test in the laboratory revealed the full truth.

Then take the science of electricity, that great force that gives us light and power and heat, and is already put to a

multitude of uses, which are constantly being added to. This was a secret that Nature guarded well, for one of the chief rules of her hide-and-peek games seems to be, "The choicer the gift the more craftily should it be concealed."

And so the game goes on. To each generation it is given to discover a few of the things Nature has hidden in her great playgrounds, in the innermost parts of the earth, the ocean depths, the realms of the upper air. Almost we might liken her to the fond parents who hide their precious Christmas gifts in the very toe of the toddler's stocking, or delay the discovery of the choicest gift by fold after fold of wrapping-paper. Almost we might liken her to the earthly father, but not quite; for, after all, the discovery of all of these books to the human race but gives us a conception of what the heavenly Father has laid up for man in His infinite thought and love.

"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof."

Nature is His hand-maiden, but His is the great school of life, and year by year He is guiding His people forward towards a larger wisdom. Slowly, gradually, with infinite reserves, with delicate confidences, are being unfolded to men and women secrets that are mighty in their significance.

The Epworth Leaguer who will ponder this subject well, who will make a study of Nature's revelations to men, will find much that is uplifting, inspiring and educative, and which will broaden his mind, and enlighten others whom he may seek to interest. Study for yourself Nature's game of hide-and-peek; enter with a willing mind into her academy, and perchance even to you she may discover things hidden from the unseeing. But while you commune with Nature seek also for the best prize of the school of life, which is, to become a scholar well-beloved of the Master.

For an evening of this kind devoted to the discovery of the secrets of nature, I would suggest three short papers, followed by a more general survey of the topic by the leader as follows:

What Watts gave to the human race.

What Edison gave to the human race.

The science of electric energy.

Then with suitable Scriptural reading, hymns, and one or two special musical selections should make an interesting evening.