

For the EDUCATIONAL REVIEW.]

**Nature Talks in Primary Grades.**

BY MRS. S. PATTERSON.

And Nature, the old nurse, took  
The child upon her knee,  
Saying, "Here is a story-book  
Thy Father hath written for thee."

"Come, wander with me," she said,  
"Into regions yet untrod;  
And read what is still unread  
In the manuscript of God."

And he wandered away and away  
With Nature, the dear old nurse,  
Who sang to him night and day  
The rhymes of the universe.

And whenever the way seemed long,  
Or his heart began to fail,  
She would sing a more wonderful song,  
Or tell a more marvellous tale.

—From Longfellow's "Birthday Poem to Agassiz."

Fish in the school-room! Impossible! Of what use anyway? I know absolutely nothing about them; and, in any case, the cost of an aquarium quite settles the matter.

Thus the little school-ma'am. And she still doubts when you point out the fact that any large bowl or basin will hold enough water for little fish to swim in, a glass one, of course, being preferable in the interests of observation. But their food,—she has not the slightest idea how they should be fed, and has no time to feed them if she did know. Then you gently suggest that a few sedges or grass-like plants such as grow in wet places should be put in the bowl. Also, and here you hesitate slightly, there should be some of what is generally known as green slime, so often seen on the surfaces of stagnant pools. The repugnance to this last-named requisite is somewhat overcome when you explain that it is in reality a specimen of plant-growth, furnishing food for the fish, and at the same time tending to keep the water pure by taking from it decomposed organic matter.

But after all this is ready, where are the fish to come from? Gold-fish are not to be had for the asking. Possibly it would be a mistake to purchase them if we could, as our special object is to get the children interested in the common things around them, and to see the beauty which too often passes unnoticed. The question of where the fish are to come from is an easy one to answer. The nearest pond or brook will furnish different specimens; and it should not be hard to find a boy to select them.

Minnows are very pretty fish; and one of the most beautiful of our common fish is the dace, which has tail and fins tipped with red. Sticklebacks, or pin-fish, as the children call them, are very easy to get and most interesting to study. They are so-called because they have spines along their backs like thorns or pins. One little school-ma'am who believed in the value of awakening interest through observation, caught a small trout herself one afternoon, and brought it to school next morning in a canning-bottle. It was transferred to a basin and became the centre of interest for two days, after which it was again placed in the bottle and carried by the children to a brook about half a mile away, where it was released to find a new home.

There is a fascination about the easy, graceful movement of a fish in water. Without any apparent effort he glides noiselessly about, sinking, darting rapidly from place to place, and, again, resting motionless for a second or two, or moving lazily along as if the mere joy of living was enough. Then the shimmer of the colors! Let those who think fish uninteresting give five minutes' close attention to one moving in the water, and note when the time is up if they are as indifferent as before.

Even if a teacher has no information to give on the subject, still it is good for the children to be encouraged to observe, and in this way to find out for themselves. When interest is once aroused there are ways of getting questions answered. They can observe the general outward structure of the fish, the large mouth, the small head, the position of the fins and their movement, the tail, and the help it is to the fish in swimming, serving as it does both as an oar and as a rudder.

Dissection and minute study are quite out of place in primary work. Childhood is the time for the awakening of interest in living things and of sympathy with them. Adapt the work to the child's condition; take advantage of his judgment of life and movement and change, and quicken his sympathies by chats and stories about living things, together with observation of their habits. Develop in him that self-control which brings the power of enjoying things without an inordinate desire for possession. Apart from such training the interest may degenerate into cruelty.

Little children are not capable of deep thought, nor is it according to their nature to think long at a time about any one thing; their attention is easily diverted, and, indeed, they have not the power to