

NATURE STUDY AND SCHOOL GARDENING

We are all familiar with the slogan, "Back to the Farm," and know that it was adopted to awaken an interest in agriculture, and keep persons on the farm. When thousands of men and women, boys and girls, left the farm to work in town or city, there was just that decrease in the number of food providers; food became scarcer, and prices higher. The problem became a source of worry to the State; something had to be done. Agricultural societies were formed; agricultural colleges opened. Farming was elevated to a profession, and taught scientifically; subsidies were granted to these colleges, and competition was encouraged and rewarded.

During the agricultural depression between the years 1891 and 1893, charitable institutions had to give assistance to many people who had come from the rural districts of New York state. This looked as though New York state was incapable of supporting her own population. A conference was held to discuss ways and means of bettering the condition. People came from all over the state, and among others, Mr. George Powell, Director of Farmer's Institutes of the state. Mr. Powell, at the first meeting, made a strong plea for interesting the children of the community in farming, and maintained that the first step toward agriculture was Nature study. He spoke from experience, because he had given lessons in nature to boys and girls of the communities where he had conducted institutes. The committee decided to introduce the course in Westchester schools; the result was satisfactory. It was then decided to extend the work, and as he was much interested in improving farming conditions of the state, he said if the introduction of Nature study in the schools would benefit these conditions, an appropriation would be made. This was given to Cornell University. It is here that the best course in nature can be obtained. This movement spread to other states, and into Canada. Our best college of agriculture is McDonald College at St. Anne de Bellevue, Quebec.

So much for why Nature Study is on our Curriculum, but What is Nature Study?

Nature study is the study of Nature; it consists of simple, truthful observations, therefore the object of the Nature study teacher should be to cultivate in children powers of accurate observations and to build up within them powers of understanding. It is nature that broadens the child's mind, by furnishing him with practical and useful

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knowledge. It trains his imagination, but brings home to him, above everything, that he must tell only what is true. Nature insists on his being accurate, wide-awake, and self-reliant. She cultivates a love for the beautiful, and brings to him a perception of color, form, and music. Last and most important, Nature study gives the child a sense of companionship with life out-of-doors, and a love for Nature.

Was there ever a child who was not interested in birds and insects? They may not at all be interested in plants, but give a lesson on birds, and listen to their experiences, or talk about the good or injury done man by animals or insects, and the class is alive. One other fact have I noticed. Not all phases of the work interest all pupils, but each is keenly interested in some phase. I especially remember one girl, who was not much interested until we began some work on locating the stars. A diagram was drawn on the blackboard, and copied into the children's notebook. This girl had all the groups located inside of a week, and pointed them out to me. She was simply delighted to think she had discovered them.

There is no subject in our course that will benefit