

NATURE NOTE BOOKS

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In her 'Essay towards a Philosophy of Education,' 1922, Charlotte Mason wrote: 'The nature note books which originated in the Parents' Union School have recommended themselves pretty widely as travelling companions and life records wherein the "finds" of every season, bird or flower, fungus or moss, are sketched and described *somewhat* in the manner of Gilbert White. The nature note book is very catholic and finds room for the stars in their courses and for, say, the fossil anemone found on the beach at Whitby. Certainly these note books do a good deal to bring science within the range of common thought and experience.' The students' nature note books began early in 1893 when a House of Education Natural History Club, led by Miss M. L. Hodgson, was started. One student of that year is known to have continued her book through years in India and at home until the present day. Under the inspiration they felt at the College, others have done intensive studies in Austria, Italy, Brazil, East, South or West Africa, as well as at home.

My first summer at College was a very hot one and the flow of Scandale beck was reduced to isolated pools in which Miss Hodgson showed us caddis worms and stone-fly larvae.

Mr. Herbert Geldart inspected the nature note books from 1893 to 1901 and then began Rev. A. Thornley's association with the House of Education's nature study which continued for thirty-five years. He judged the note books generously and when Mrs. Thornley added her comments on the quality of the brushwork, it helped us very much. But it was the two or three days' walks each summer term, during which Mr. Thornley accepted and named every sort of specimen we collected, which taught the students and their teachers what it was to study nature out of doors. The after hours devoted to painting what had been brought home, and to consulting Mr. Thornley's classified lists of the insects he had caught for us, were very precious. This was the material for science. Notes on these walks might be illustrated in the margins in after years when the mosses, for example, were better known. Conversely, it is delightful when something not known has been painted, to find the name of it unexpectedly years after. Two instances have come my way recently. There was a charming little lichen, allied to the 'cup-mosses,' which looked like tiny pink toadstools on a green ground. Ten years after it was painted, a figure and the name, *Baeomyces Roseus*, were found in a new handbook on British Lichens. The other painting was of a spider's nest on a delicate herb found in a wood in February 1932. A few notes had been written beside it. The exact description and the name, *Agrocea*, were given last December in a new book called *Stand and Stare* by Murray and Newman. Many a student visiting France or Switzerland has painted as many of the flowers and insects as she could and obtained the names afterwards.

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Two badgers have been tracked in the snow this winter into a thicket of rhododendrons reminding me of a lecture on tracking from Professor Ernest Thompson Seton in 1909, who gave us a second impromptu lecture in the College. For whenever Miss Mason had a visit from an expert, she invited him to benefit her students. The Rev. A. Tuckwell founded a Botanical Garden in 1901 which was maintained until the first world war. Valuable advice was given by Miss Sophia Arnitt whose wonderful botanical paintings are now in the Arnitt Library of

Ambleside. The Hon. Mrs. Franklin brought some of Miss Whyte's beautiful paintings of toadstools to show us. And we found by degrees quite a good fungus flora in the College grounds with from thirty to forty species recurring in the same spots. It remains to be seen whether the motor mower and the felling of beeches have altered that.

Miss Gertrude Bell was familiar with the rarer Lake District flowers and those on the highest fells partly through her father's constant association with scientists who came to explore the neighbourhood. He had accompanied one of these, Professor J. E. Marr, to the places on the south side of Wausfell where fossils were exposed. It was not too far for us to visit on a half holiday. The purple saxifrage, too, could be reached in its season, on a half holiday. Opportunities for searching the higher fells or the surrounding limestone, or the seaside, came at half-term and prepared students to carry on their observations in other localities during the vacations. It is not long since good studies were done on the seashore in Wales and in N.W. Ireland during the Christmas holidays. It has become a custom to visit the bird sanctuary of the Cumberland coast when the seabirds are nesting and much enthusiasm has been shown as a result.

Miss Kitching, whose authorities were Miss Louisa Arnitt and Mr. Arthur Astley, has always shared her love of birds with the students and of course there are nesting boxes for the pied fly-catcher at the College. Waterhead marshes are a regular station for migrating birds and some of them nest there. Ex-students who have helped to interest their successors in watching birds are too numerous to mention. Others, perhaps returning for a refresher course, have passed on their special hobbies as Miss M. Owen did with her great interest in mosses and liverworts.

A good summary of local knowledge is a map such as Miss Kitching has made of the places where migrants and rare birds have been seen. Other summaries are lists kept on squared paper at the end of the nature note book with a column for every month. A bird list thus shows which birds are native and which are migrants or winter visitors and how long they stay. If two lines or more are allowed for each name, successive years can be compared. In a flower list, such a table shows the earliest date at which the stamens are showing and to check the list on the first of each month indicates how long each plant flowers.

It is obvious that nature note books were inseparable from nature walks and they also involved the study of books and classification. A complete lesson on ferns or grasses, for example, might be given in the garden, but lectures on plants and animals, geology and astronomy, illustrated by specimens from museum or countryside, supplemented the out-of-door discoveries and also suggested what might be sought for.

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'Silver fishes' might generally be found among stocks of cardboard to start the course on Insects. Quite likely a senior mistress may remember helping me to catch a cricket on the old kitchen hearth for next day's lecture. Present students have found 'sea gooseberries' at Arnside and one has painted a 'sea squirt.' The lectures were also intended to help the student to use the books set on the Parents' Union School programmes.

Star maps in the nature note books can show which constellations have been recognised, or perhaps give the position of a planet in a familiar group of stars. In February 1916, four planets could be seen above the horizon at one time and I remember that Miss Mason came into the verandah at 7 p.m. to look at them with us. The College front 220 feet

above sea-level, is a good observatory for the southern sky, when weather permits. From the grounds at the back it is fascinating to watch the northern stars over Fairfield revolving from night to morning and from night to night. The aurora borealis has been seen there during the last two winters. Through the College telescope, we saw a comet from time to time, or Jupiter's moons and Saturn's rings, or the moon's craters. On 29th June 1929, we made an expedition as a body to Bowden moor in Yorkshire, to see the total eclipse of the sun. It was a most memorable event.

Mr. Thornley set great store by quotations from the poets inserted in the nature note books. It is a good way to indicate feeling for the beauty we see by quoting from great poetry, such as Wordsworth's which becomes familiar to dwellers among the Lakes. There are also lovely prose passages, in Ruskin, for example, or W. H. Hudson, as a recent paper in the *Parents' Review* on 'How to enjoy wild flowers' has shown. The wealth of beautifully illustrated nature books now published does not invalidate our nature note books. That we have them, as Miss Mason describes them in the passage I began with, is her gift to us and we know that nothing can be substituted for the value and pleasure of knowing Nature at first hand.