

THE MEANING OF THE NATURE STUDY MOVEMENT

by *Liberty Hyde Bailey*

From: Liberty H. Bailey, The Nature Study Idea (New York: Doubleday, page, 1904).

It is one of the marks of the evolution of the race that we are coming more and more into sympathy with the objects of the external world. These things are a part of our lives. They are central to our thoughts. The happiest life has the greatest number of points of contact with the world, and it has the deepest feeling and sympathy for everything that is. The best thing in life is sentiment; and the best sentiment is that which is born of the most accurate knowledge. I like to make this application of Emerson's injunction to "hitch your wagon to a star"; but it must not be forgotten that one must have the wagon before one has the star. Mere facts are dead, but the meaning of the facts is life. The getting of information is but the beginning of education. "With all thy getting, get understanding."

Of late years there has been a rapidly growing feeling that we must live closer to nature; and we must perforce begin with the child. We attempt to teach this nature-love in the schools, and we call the effort nature study. It would be better if it were called nature-sympathy.

As yet there are no codified methods of teaching nature study. The subject is not a formal part of the curriculum; and thereby it is not perfunctory. And herein lies much of its value - in the fact that it cannot be reduced to a system, is not cut and dried, cannot become a part of rigid school methods. Its very essence is spirit. It is as free as its subject-matter, as far removed from the museum and the cabinet as the skeleton is from the living animal.

It thus transpires that there is much confusion as to what nature study is, because of the different attitudes of its various exponents; but these different attitudes are largely the reflections of different personalities and the working out of different methods. There may be twenty best ways of teaching nature study. It is essentially the expression of one's outlook on the world. We must define nature study in terms of its