

ORNITHOLOGY.

A Paper Read by M. A. Oulton at the Teachers' Institute, Hartland, 1893.

The subject to which I wish to invite your attention for a brief time is "Bird Study" in the schools of New Brunswick. As the boys and girls of our fair province reach the school age they are in part severed from parental care and thus ushered off to the city, village or country school as the case may be. They are then made acquainted with the school exercises which forerun the more difficult exercises of the high or grammar school, then to meet and encounter the difficult problems of the college curriculum. These exercises as a rule seem a dark cloud to many of the "little tots" and the problem which confronts the supervising teacher is how can this cloud be brightened or substituted for a ray of joyful light.

I believe that much can be done in this line by slightly going beyond the three educational R's and by careful observation lead the pupils under our care to observe intelligently those things seen on the way to and from the school room in the form of feathered beings as they sit on their beloved perches pouring out their melodious notes to the enjoyment of the passers by.

WHEN TO BEGIN TO STUDY.

As the sun begins his journey northward causing the snowy bank to disappear beneath its vertical rays, many of the icy pools will be decked, shrouded, and surrounded by flower, foliage and feather, thus Nature may be said to be awaking from her wintery sleep and clothing the face of the earth with that verdure necessary for the maintenance of animal life; but what is the source of that soothing music which we hear coming from the much frequented grove, the lawn or the neighboring tree? The answer that is generally given to this question is "Why that's a bird singing—a spring bird." "No not a goose nor a duck, but a bird." But all persons do not rest satisfied with the above answer, and an intelligent father's question is "Janie, what bird is that?" Now where is Janie to get her answer for this question? I believe the father looks to the school as the source for this answer, and if Janie is fairly intelligent and provided with school privileges, and the bird be a common songster, why should Janie not be able to give a correct answer to this question? Or why is the father not justified in looking to the school as a source of a correct answer from his daughter? I believe the father is justified in taking the stand that the source ought to be the school. Thus my friends we are as teachers expected to teach Bird-study in our school and as a matter of fact we are invited to do so by our obligations as seen in searching the Natural History, by Prof. Bailey, or Nature Lessons, by Prof. Brittain. Thus I would say that the time for us to begin Bird-study in school is as soon as Spring tells of the departing snow.

The teacher of the advanced department of a Graded, Superior or Grammar School will find ample scope for observing carefully, on his morning open air walks, and classifying accurately the common song birds of N. B., such as the sparrows, finches, crossbeaks, etc., and it is to this class to which I wish to draw special emphasis.

The question which confronts us now is how are we to teach these birds to pupils and are we to memorize what a prescribed book says on this matter? The reply to the latter question should be distinctly, no, not at all. To do so would be to use paper and ink as the teacher for lessons which none but Nature can accurately impart, and to rob Nature of the privilege of teaching our pupils many a useful lesson.

In the early spring as the floral and foliage buds burst forth thus surrounding us with flowers and leaves in abundance, nothing is more common than to see a group of scholars looking for flowers of various kinds, such as violets, trilliums, dandelions, anemones, etc., for to compose a nice bouquet, and as these flowers peep up their little heads just as the robin or the purple grackle skims

by, they (the scholars) generally return with the news that they have seen a bird

Now, taking into account the fact that the pupils know a bird when they see it, it is high time for him (the teacher) to form a bird class, which will of course be the Natural Science class, and to begin work in this line vigorously. But how is the class work to be carried on and where? Each pupil is to watch carefully each song bird as he returns to the spot appointed to him by the "guiding Hand of the great Creator, who bids the swallow observe the time of her coming," and to be able to give a satisfactory description of each bird, with a few remarks on his habits and song.

MODE OF CONDUCTING A LESSON.

The pupils in groups of twos, threes and fours, will be the observers of the different birds, hence the teacher must give them some idea as to plan for observing and approaching birds. Pupils attired in gay-colored costumes will be held as enemies by the birds, and especially if the predominating color be red or scarlet; hence they should be attired in dull colored garments when out on a bird expedition.

Each pupil as he finds a bird, makes his analysis of the same along the following line: If the bird is found at relative rest, notice (a) the chief feature of its form, whether long or short, thick or slender; then (b) the general color of the plumage at a distance. After this is done, the observer will approach the bird for closer inspection. This may be done in most cases by moving gently, quietly and slowly in the direction of the bird, but in some cases the observer will by keeping perfectly still, attract the bird, which is filled with curiosity to him. Now, since the pupil and bird are in close quarters, the close quartered analysis may be carried on as follows: Secure as accurately as possible (a) the distance from head to tip of the tail, (b) the height its body stands above the perch and if its head is adorned with a top knot and the colour of same if present, (c) the color, length and shape of the beak (d) the colour of the head, noting the nature of the eye, whether it appears to stare as will be seen in the case of the wrens or whether it is of an innocent nature as that of the slate-coloured junco, (e) the colour of neck, breast, back, wing and tail, noting carefully any brilliant streak or spot and if a terminal belt decks the tail as in the case of the formidable king-bird.

CONTRAST OF BIRD WITH MATE.

The pupil having now completed the analysis of his bird will notice whether the mate is not near by, and, if so, he will contrast male and female in respect to (a) colour, (b) size, (c) song, and (d) habits, noting carefully the resemblance and also the disagreements of the same. No stronger example of contrast will be seen than in the case of the Canadian Bob-a-link. The pupil will next note carefully the surrounding scenery, then, having heard his song, he may come out of his place of concealment and allow the bird in turn to examine his admirer, but notice the uneasy nature he exhibits as if he were looking for a stray stone or the more dangerous "sling-shot," used as a means of sport by some boys. And in a brief time he is gone to seek a more sheltered spot, but this will only afford the privilege of learning his mode of flight whether straight forward, as seen in the case of the song-parrow, or in undulations, as displayed by the wood-pecker; also whether any new colours appear as will be seen by noticing the departing flicker, together with the spread of the wings and the shape of the tail.

(Continued next week.)

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