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978-1-107-66278-0 - The Story of Our Trees: In Twenty-Four Lessons

Margaret M. Gregson

Frontmatter

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THE STORY OF
OUR TREES

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Twelve-year old Spruce Plantation in Røken, Norway
(planted by school children)

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THE STORY OF OUR TREES

IN TWENTY-FOUR LESSONS

BY

MARGARET M. GREGSON, B.A.

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PREFACE

THIS book is to help children to study Nature, not to put book study instead of Nature Study. The object of the book is to direct and stimulate both observation and reflection.

Many teachers have lately found in trees a convenient topic for lessons, one that can be pursued in town or country, summer or winter, indoors or out-of-doors. There may be other teachers who would gladly give their pupils some training in Nature Study, although they themselves do not pretend to have special knowledge. Such an acknowledgment of ignorance is itself a qualification for one who, an enquirer himself, would lead others to enquire.

The use of this book will be found greatly simplified by its arrangement into 24 lessons, each complete with its own practical work. In setting additional questions, it should be remembered that children are apt to answer observation questions correctly without using their brains more than they can help. The questions therefore, should be framed so as to evoke thought as well as observation.

Great pains have been taken in the revision of these chapters to fit them into the natural cycle of the seasons, which is now widely accepted as the best order for nature lessons, and is, indeed, the compulsory order

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if free use is to be made of fresh material. The supplies necessary for each lesson are clearly indicated. But the lessons have also been adapted (and this is a much more difficult adaptation) to the school year and, again, to the different years in use at different schools. For Secondary schools beginning with new classes in September, the book begins at Chapter I. But, if some Primary schools rearrange classes at Easter, the lessons may begin under the stimulus of the spring at Chapter XIII, and afterwards pass from Chapter XIV in summer to Chapter I at the beginning of autumn. Or, if some other schools make promotions in January, it will do equally well to start at Chapter VII and work round the year to Chapter VI in December.

A special effort has been made to assign as much work as possible to the winter months, and thus to meet the difficulties of any school time-table which allots a uniform number of hours per week to Nature Study, hours insufficient to cope with the splendour of the spring, hours harder to fill in the gloom of November. In this way, it is possible to treat some aspects of the many-sided interests aroused by trees which would have been crowded out by lessons intended only for the summer term.

The serious inquiries now being made into National Afforestation show that we may have to enlist the sympathy of boys and girls in the planting and protection of new woodlands. The festival of Arbor Day might well be transplanted from America to the rural schools of the British Isles. A chapter on Forestry and tree planting will, therefore, be welcome. In the revision of this we have had the assistance of Mr S. Burt Meyer, of York, a trained forester. To him, our thanks are

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Margaret M. Gregson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Preface*

vii

also due for arranging for the use of some beautiful Norwegian photographs one of which, Fig. 32, shows the schoolboys at work clearing the ground, another, the frontispiece, shows the girls of Røken standing in a plantation of about their own age, which had been planted by school children 12 years before.

Mrs Gregson is a former student of Newnham College, and studied in Cambridge under Prof. H. Marshall Ward, whose well-known volumes have supplied many of the illustrations used here. Her lessons are adapted to classes where the ages range from 14 to 12 or even younger, that is to the higher standards of elementary schools, to preparatory schools, to the lower forms of secondary schools and especially to those who are taught privately at home.

Mrs Gregson has shown in numerous examples that style of large, clear, accurate drawing which every pupil may be expected to attempt. Teachers requiring a 'key' may refer to the exquisite drawings in Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, and to the latest standards of fidelity, Henry Irving's photographs in *The Nature Book*.

We must not let the trees hide the wood from us. The study of the trees is only the beginning of the study of the wood. The wood means far more than its trees alone. There is the undergrowth of brambles or of bracken, the carpet of spring flowers, ferns, mosses, dead leaves or pine needles. Then there are the insects, the purple emperor butterflies aloft and the ringlets in the glades. There are beetles boring in the rotten wood; indeed, a whole book has been written (by Mr Gillander of Alnwick) on *Forest Entomology*. After the insects come the birds—the tits, the gold-crest, the treecreeper, the woodpecker; and the owls and

woodcock haunt the wood as well. The study of all this wealth of life is no idle or frivolous byepath, it is the essence of Nature Study, the study of all the complex web of relationships in which all living things and lifeless forces are bound together. Here, these explorations are left for teacher and pupil to pursue as opportunity of time and circumstance may allow.

The study from manifold points of view of this inter-connection of woodland life may assist us in the attempt to unravel the complexities of social life in human society. Perhaps the poet was hardly thinking of evolutionary ethics when he wrote

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.

None the less, these simple lessons on trees may be used as a thread on which to string still greater thoughts all round the circling year, whilst great new ideas are transforming our minds as silently as the seasons transform the woodland.

HUGH RICHARDSON.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	INTRODUCTORY	1
II.	FRUITS AND SEEDS	10
III.	LEAF CASTING	24
IV.	THE GROWTH OF SEEDS	29
V.	WINTER BUDS AND TREE FORMS	36
VI.	TREE PLANTING AND TREE FELLING	43
VII.	EVERGREENS	58
VIII.	HOW A TREE LIVES	66
IX.	THE ROOT	75
X.	THE TRUNK	81
XI.	CATKINS	87
XII.	THORNY AND CLIMBING PLANTS	93
XIII.	LEAF BUDS	99
XIV.	THE LEAF	104
XV.	THE FLOWER	128
	APPENDIXES	150
	INDEX	159

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-66278-0 - The Story of Our Trees: In Twenty-Four Lessons

Margaret M. Gregson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

FIGURE	PAGE
Twelve-year old plantation, planted by school children, Norway (<i>Phot. Brekke, Christiania</i>)	<i>Frontispiece</i>
1. A Log Chute, Canada	2
2. Checking timber, Norway (<i>Phot. Brekke, Christiania</i>)	3
3. A Log Raft, Canada	5
4. Fern Leaf in Coal-shale	6
5. Typical Midland Scenery (<i>Phot. Frith</i>)	7
6. Japanese Dwarf Trees	9
7. Pine Cone	11
8. Young Apple	12
9. Seed-vessel of Narcissus	15
10. Plum and Grape	16
11. Seed-vessels	17
12. Acorns	18
13. Coco-nut	21
14. Dandelion fruit	22
15. Falling Horse-chestnut leaves	25
16. Old Scotch Pine	26
17. Germination of a Broad Bean	30
18. Broad Bean plant	31
19. Horse-chestnut seedling	34
20. Climbing shoot of Ivy	37
21. Horse-chestnut twig	38
22. Leaf of Plane	39
23. Diagram showing development of buds	41
24. Wind-blown tree (<i>Phot. F. Mort</i>)	42
25. 20-year old Fir trees (<i>Phot. Brekke, Christiania</i>)	45
26. Planting a young Pine	46

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-66278-0 - The Story of Our Trees: In Twenty-Four Lessons

Margaret M. Gregson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*List of Illustrations*

xi

FIGURE	PAGE
27. 100-year old Pine forest in Thüringia	51
28. Tool used in planting young Oaks	52
29. Planting a young Oak tree	53
30. Saw-mills, Breconshire (<i>Phot.</i> F. Evans)	54
31. Two methods of tree felling	55
32. Norwegian School Children preparing land for tree planting (<i>Phot.</i> Brekke, Christiania)	57
33. Swiss Pine trees in September	60
34. Twig of Scotch Pine	62
35. Young Scotch Pines	64
36. Soluble and Insoluble substances	67
37. Germinating seeds using up part of the air	74
38. Young Oak	77
39. Wheat seedling	78
40. Wheat seedling with soil sticking to the root hairs	79
41. Cross-section of an Oak trunk	82
42. Trunk of Plane tree with scaly bark	84
43. Trunk of Oak tree with fissured bark	85
44. Hazel twig and catkins	89
45. Hornbeam	90
46. Birch	91
47. Hawthorn twig	95
48. Gooseberry twig	96
49. Brambles growing in a wood (<i>Phot.</i> S. Mangham)	97
50. An opening Beech bud	100
51. Twig of Pear tree	102
52. Beech twig	103
53. Three Stomata	106
54. Leaf of Guelder Rose	107
55. Elm twig	111
56. Birches in Sherwood Forest (<i>Phot.</i> Henson & Co.)	112
57. Shoot of Norway Maple	113
58. The Leaves of a Plantain	115
59. Leaf of Birch	117
60. Leaf of Red Currant	118
61. Leaf of Ash	120
62. Black Wood of Rannoch, Perthshire (<i>Phot.</i> A. G. Tansley)	123
63. Development of Gorse thorns	127

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-66278-0 - The Story of Our Trees: In Twenty-Four Lessons

Margaret M. Gregson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xii

List of Illustrations

FIGURE	PAGE
64. Horse-chestnut flower	129
65. Inflorescence of a Rose	133
66. Barberry flowers	136
67. Willow catkins	137
68. Pear flowers	138
69. Ivy flowers	139
70. Flowers of Spindle Tree	140
71. Flowers of Laurustinus	141
72. Laburnum flower	145
73. Horse-chestnut flowers	146
74. Honeysuckle flowers	147

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