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AGASSIZ AND THE SCHOOL AT PENIKESE¹

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IN establishing the Anderson School of Natural History, Agassiz transferred his methods of instruction from his brick and iron-girded museum in Cambridge to the wooden barn-like structure at Penikese. The work was to be based on observation and experiment. Animals alone were to be studied, and in every instance the animal was to be under the eye of the student; nowhere was a list of books suggested for reference or consultation, and recitations consisted in answering the questions asked by the teacher as to what the student had observed in his studies. As in the Cambridge Museum the student had set before him a long, shallow tin pan, and in it was placed a fish, crab, lobster or some other animal, alive or dead, alcoholic or dry, and he was required to study and dissect it. Scudder, the entomologist, gave an amusing account in *The Atlantic Monthly* of his initial experience as a student of Agassiz in Cambridge. His previous natural history studies had been almost exclusively confined to butterflies and after his experiences with these dry and charming creatures he had placed before him a big fish which he was required to haul out from a jar of alcohol which was charged with the odoriferous juices of many previous specimens. This bad smelling object he had to examine for three days and to tell Agassiz what he had seen. Among other results this method taught students to use their eyes, an art already acquired by Scudder in his previous study of insects.

Agassiz realized in opening this school what temptations would arise in living near the sea side, and in an early circular he suggests the stipulations he required of the students by saying, "I must make hard work a condition of continued connection with the school, and desire to impress it upon the applicants for admission that Penikese Island is not to be regarded as a summer resort and relaxation. I do not propose to give much instruction in matters which may be learned from books, I want, on the contrary, to prepare those who shall attend to *observe for themselves*. I would, therefore, advise all those who wish only to be taught natural history in the way it is generally taught, by recitation, to give up their intention of joining the school." This sound advice was

¹ Address at the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the school at Penikese, Wood's Hole, August 13, 1923.

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