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NOTES OF A NATURALIST

Specially Contributed to the Guardian

JULY, 1928.

On the last day of July the sun rose at 4.40 a.m. and set at 7.30 p.m. with a possible 14 hours 50 minutes of sunshine. A correspondent of a Canadian newspaper, living in the north of Scotland, says the sun rises there at 2 a.m. and sets at 9 p.m. The long summer twilight of the Old Land is very favorable to those who indulge in field sports; there is a long evening to devote to cricket, etc., after the work of the day is over. On that day (21st) I noticed the first yellow leaves on the birches in front of the house. How fast our summers go! July 27th, the sun is 6 min. 22 sec. behind the local mean time, and from then speeds up till Sept. 1st, when they agree again. A considerable amount of rain fell during the month, much of it without any perturbation of the barometer. "When the sky threatens and the barometer says nothing, look out for squalls!" Several Auroras, electric storms, and rainbows were recorded; in spite of an old lady's dictum that "there are no nice rainbows as there used to be!" On the 21st at 10 p.m., I noted a high, bright aurora not much pulsation to it the wind was light or brisk next day and the sky clear, but on the 23rd rain commenced to fall about 6 p.m., and fell till after 6 a.m. on the 24th, the gauge registering over an inch of rainfall. That is considerably over 100 tons to the acre. On the afternoon of the 21st the cat held a circus on the lawn; a cat is peculiarly sensitive to any electrical change in the air; and as my readers have perhaps proved, will, itself, give an electric spark if rubbed the wrong way. So when Thomas sported on the green, I said, "some change coming," and the Aurora and subsequent rain and high wind gave reply.

The squalls and rain showers made it very "tricky" weather for hay-making, and the long cold spring has, I think, on the lighter land, reduced the yield.

House flies (musca domestica) have not been very numerous this summer, but there have been numbers of the Bluebottle Fly (Calliphora erythrocephala) to make up for their absence. Potato Beetles were early on their job; June-bugs very scarce. On a visit to town I collected some caterpillars from the lime-trees near St. Paul's church; they were those of a Tussock Moth; probably the "white-marked T. M." from their coral-colored head. As the moth lays its eggs in masses on the trunk or main limbs of trees, they can be collected and burned any time between Sept. and April, or creosote oil may be applied to the egg masses by means of a small brush. Spraying will kill the caterpillars, when they are hatched, but it will readily be seen that it is a "big job" in a city so embowered as Charlottetown. There was another infestation a few years ago, and the trees were all banded to prevent the female moths (which are wingless) from crawling up and depositing their eggs. Nature, however, provides the great remedial; when any insect becomes too numerous (over-crowded) some bacterial or parasitic disease breaks out, and restores the balance. All the same, "Heaven helps those who help themselves," and the lindens (limes), the glory of Charlottetown, are worthy of any effort made to free them from this pest. In the United States there are two broods annually, one appearing early and being full grown by the middle of June; the second hatches in July and feeds till the middle of August, when the caterpillars enter the cocoon state. From these the moths emerge at the end of the month and lay their eggs which remain dormant till next Spring. From the lateness of our infestation and the short season, it is probable that there is only one brood here. The smaller white cabbage butterfly (Pieris ranae L.) is as abundant this year as it was last. It is said to attack all cruciferous plants and also mignonette, but it most certainly prefers cabbages to turnips. As the summer waxes it is wonderful what a collection of insects may be made without stirring from the house. Numbers of the vast tribes of the Diptera, Hymenoptera, and some Coleoptera find ingress and may be captured on the windows.

MacSwain in his "Flora of P. E. Island" (1890) records Oenothera biennis, L., and O. pumila, L., as the two Evening Primroses found here. In a Weed Survey (1926) Prof. Groh, of Ottawa, found O. maritima, L. Two Evening Primroses appeared in my garden this Spring, and, although I am averse to letting anything that is "unkraut" (weed-like) grow there, I allowed them to remain for future study; and it was fortunate I did so. One turned out to be O. maritima, which I find very common; the other was new to me. O. crucifera, I sent part of it to Prof. Groh, who confirmed my determination and said that the only other Canadian record was from Sable Island. I afterwards found two other plants of crucifera, one near the house and one in the "shore field," about two-thirds of a mile away. It may be commoner than we think; for instance, the young man who cut the field did not notice that it was any different from the other species. Finally, Dr. Britton, in his "Manual," limits its range to Maine, N. Y., and Mass., so I sent that distinguished botanist part of the plant, to show what we can do in P. E. I. Another previously unrecorded plant found its way to the National Herbarium, Ottawa, last year, and had the distinction of being the only specimen of Senecio sylvatica, L., the Wood Groundsel, in that collection. It is not given in the local Flora, but Dr. Britton gives it as occurring from "N. S. and Pr. Edw. Isl. to Me." It seems to be sporadic but usually abundant in the locality it favors. About the middle of July the

crowds began to be in evidence again. Early in the Spring they spread out over the country and were plentiful here, but the coming of the grackles—"blackbirds"—forced them away from this district. The grackles, fearful for their eggs and young, assailed them at every opportunity; hawks fared no better. But now that the grackles have congregated into flocks, the crows are coming back. I cannot recall such a scarcity of robins and attribute this to the attacks of squirrels and grackles. The Kingbird seems to be holding its own; I saw a flock of perhaps a score on the roadside trees (July 30), flying along till one drew near, then flying a little further. They are pugnacious birds, but the only harm attributed to them is a fondness for eating the bees where there are apiaries, whence, in some localities, they are called "Bee Martins." Towards the middle of the month the young swallows left their nest on the rafters of the barn and essayed their first flight. They were timid about it and sat for much of the day on the cross beams, while the old birds flew about below them, as if urging them to "try again." It was two days before they ventured outside, and then they circled and swooped, so that one could not distinguish them from their parents. There were five young. Some years ago, I made a collection of the Wasps (genus Vespa)

of this Province. This, of course, includes only such wasps as the Hornet, and the various Yellow Jackets," for the Mud-wasps belong to another genus. Wasps are plentiful this year, but collecting them calls for a somewhat adventurous spirit. There are in my collection: (A) Eyes not nearly reaching to mandibles (jaws). (1) Vespa maculata (L.) "Black Hornet," "Bald-faced Hornet." Large, marked white, not yellow; flagellum (antenna) testaceous beneath. Nest suspended from trees. (2) V. diabolic (De Saussure.) "Common Yellow Jacket." Ordinary size, markings yellow. The yellow band on the first of the body segment (next to the thorax) interrupted, or nearly so, in the middle. Antennae testaceous (that is, shell-pink) beneath. Nests among stumps, wood-piles, and the like. (B) Eyes touching the base of mandibles or very closely contiguous. (3) V. consobrina (De Saussure.) A neat looking wasp, with white markings; hair on the first segment black, not pale. This and the next following, as far as is known, build their nests within the ground. (Rohwer). (4) V. vulgaris (L.) Markings yellow. "Base of first abdominal segment black, with a black point (interruption) in the middle of the yellow posterior margin." (Rohwer) This point is triangular. (5) V. scadicus, (Sladen; n.sp.) Markings yellow. The black bands of the segments contain reddish or yellow spots on either side, which however may be absent occasionally. The only specimen known to the writer is in a private collection at Mount Herbert, makes aerial nest. This list is not in any way conclusive; Sladen gives the names of fourteen species of Vespid Wasps found in Canada, although Rohwer ("Hymenoptera of Connecticut") recognizes seven species only in the Northern States. The point is that there is room for a good deal of research, which may well be based on

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Sladen's admirable paper in the Ottawa Naturalist, Vol. XXXII, page 71. No. 4. V. vulgaris (L.) in the list just given is there shown to be with a Northern range; pennsylvanica (Sauss.); vanica or flavida with a more southern range.

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