

FROM TIMES PAST

MURDER

by Lawrence W. Watson

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Murder! Murder most foul! Murder with malice prepense! Murder, too - that most awful crime - in the midst of this law-abiding community of ours! And not one murder only, but thousands of murders, - crime upon crime, death after death, gruesome assassination wholesale!

Think of it, reader, sickened by news of slaughter coming to you from distant scenes where nations war with nations, and thank you a kindly Providence that yours is surely a land of peace, where human life is deemed sacred, and death at the hand of fellow man full happily a rarity! Can you credit it that here, in fair Prince Edward Island, two wild bands, of many members each, are murdering for their living day by day, - ruthlessly, cruelly murdering - fearless of apprehension or punishment; daring, brutal and immune? But so it is, and so has been for many decades past, and probably still shall be for many centuries yet unborn. Vile enough in the crime-tainted dens of crowded cities, but who would believe it of our quiet rural districts, where Nature reigns supreme and the psalm of life is sung on every side? Let us go together into yonder dreary swamp, where alders weave a heavy barricade; where snakes glide in to feed, and pestilent insects suck one's blood. "Fit place this," say you, "for murderous gangs, if blood-stained criminals find a home in such a peaceful land as ours." But surely, they are deep within this tract, for, far as eye can reach, as yet, the scene is peaceful and the prospect pleases well.

Almost every bit of shrubbery hides a choir of warbling songsters. High above us perch, in tree-top, robin and his band of singers. Light of wing and flashing rainbow colours, gaudy butterflies flit and linger, resting here and there among the blossoms, feeding on the nectar of the flowers, drinking in the sunshine and the balmy, balsam-perfumed air.

"You are surely fooling us with tale of murder. No place this for bloody deed of carnage." "But," I answer, "murderers do not choose to slaughter full in view of gazing mortals. Still they are here, all around us, hidden deep within recesses dark, of Nature's building. See those horn-shaped pitchers, clustering around the footstalks of yon tall, strange flowers, - strangest floral structures yet examined by us. Flowers truly strange indeed, but leaves by far more curious, for here we have the murderers we are seeking, and if we look more closely, we shall see them at their work.

This is the Purple Pitcher Plant, the *Sarracenia purpurea* of botanists. Pluck off a pitcher-leaf with care, remembering that it may be partly filled with liquid, and so we find it. And what a sight is here! The pitcher contents are a mass of insects rotting in the pent up store of water - gift of rain-cloud. Now, is this chance; or is it murder? Let me prove it the latter. The edges of the leaf are grown together to form the horn-shaped pitcher dungeon; a wing-like projection extends all along the side of the pitcher nearest the parent plant. The green or reddish-tinted leaves are more or less brilliantly streaked with a purplish reticulation, or network, rendering them conspicuous objects, attractive to insects.



Leaf of
Sarracenia purpurea
about $\frac{1}{3}$ size



Side view