

THE MORALITY OF PLANTS

Part II.

(By J. Davidson, F.L.S., F.B.S.E.)
University of British Columbia.

Slide Twining Plants.

Another B. C. family—the Convolvulaceæ to which the Convolvulus and Sweet Potato belong,—shows degradation to the lowest depths, even to deliberate robbery and murder. The ancestral home of this family is in the tropics, but several members including our Convolvulus, have migrated to temperate climes both north and south where they have failed to keep up the traditions of their tropical relatives. This family occupies a much higher social position than the Ivy family, and though we might expect something better the higher we ascend, it seems to parallel what we occasionally find in human society, that members of a family in the highest social position may sink to the lowest possible depths.

The Convolvulus is not so degenerate as the Ivy—you will often find half a dozen or more Convolvulus plants contributing to each others support by the simple expedient of clinging together, like so many intoxicated individuals hanging to each other for support, illustrating the motto "United we stand divided we fail." But this twining habit, like the drinking habit, is a bad one; the Convolvulus may be able to twine around another plant without seriously affecting the latter, but this twining habit is believed by botanists to have led to further degeneracy on the part of weaker relatives of the Convolvulus; just as the example of a drinking man may lead weaker men to lower depths.

In the Convolvulus family we have a plant called Cuscuta,—better known as the Dodder. Cuscuta is a veritable vampire in whose embraces plants meet their death, and whose cunning and ingenuity almost suggests intelligence.

The seeds of this plant do not germinate till about a month later than the majority of other seeds on the same ground. It commences life—like the Convolvulus—in the soil and at an early stage takes to the climbing habit, seeking out some living plants which will finish both physical and material support. If it fails to come in contact with a host, it falls over—as if feigning death—but retains its vitality for four or five weeks, during which time something may turn up to which it can attach itself. It seems to show a preference for living parts of plants, as the growing point evidently rejects dead props.

Having secured a suitable host, it pushes suckers through the surface of the stem until they reach the system for the transportation of manufactured food. Then commences the robbery of its host. Branches will reach out and seize other plants, sometimes intertwining and becoming entangled together to cover an ever increasing area with their network. The root of the Dodder, being of no further use, dies; its whole sustenance is obtained through its death-dealing suckers.

This mode of life has led to almost complete degeneracy, no leaves and no complex supporting structures are formed, it becomes absolutely incapable of obtaining its food honestly as its ancestors did, and as its relatives do at the present time.

But robbery so often leads on to murder, and the Dodder, encouraged by the success of previous crimes, prospers and flourishes like the wicked; its slender red branches with clusters of small flowers defiantly waving in the wind, like little red flags; while the host struggling in vain for a livelihood weakens, withers and dies, done to death by a criminal member of a reputable family.

If you have imagination, think of the horror of such a death, and the sight of this vegetable octopus triumphantly shedding its offspring from the dried up skeletons of plants which supplied its food. We may have to visit Russia, or search the underworld of our large cities to find a parallel in human society. The Dodder is but one of many parasites to be found in British Columbia.

Idleness is the Beginning of Vice.

That idleness leads to degeneration is well exemplified by many plants belonging to high class families, amongst whom this type of degeneration occurs more frequently than amongst the lower classes of plants. It seems to be a natural law that degeneracy follows a life of ease.

In the vegetable kingdom we have a parallel to those members of human society whom the Hon. David Lloyd George—on introducing his Unearned Increment Tax—referred to as the "Idle Rich," meaning those individuals who obtained their position and wealth through the death of relatives, and who dissipate their wealth and talents in the pursuit of pleasure, ease and luxury.

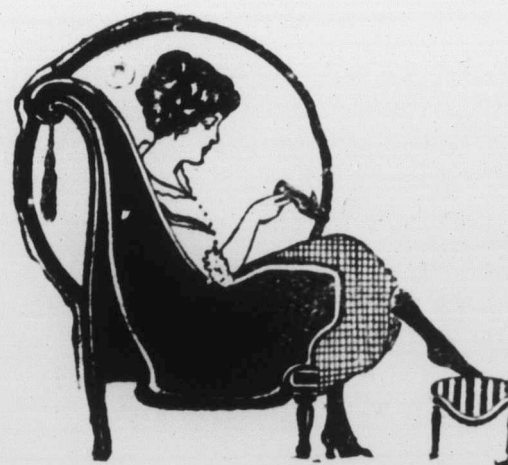
One can scarcely imagine greater degeneracy than that resulting from the robbery and murder of innocent, well behaved individuals; but in the vegetable kingdom we find the same depths reached by members of the "Idle Rich" as by the most degraded specimens of the underworld.

In British Columbia two important families of plants,—

INGLEDEW'S

VANCOUVER'S SMARTEST SHOE STORE

666 Granville Street



A SHOE STORE FEATURING

- High Quality Footwear.
- Latest Modes.
- Fair, Consistent Prices.

A SHOE STORE whose dominating policy is a courteous, painstaking service of selling and fitting shoes.