

CAN THE DIPTERA BE CONSIDERED THE HIGHEST INSECTS?

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In the Nov., 1892, number of the CANADIAN ENTOMOLOGIST, pp. 269-70, there is printed a paper which was read by Professor H. Osborn before the Entomological Club of the A. A. A. S. at its Rochester meeting in August, 1892. It is entitled: "Honey-bee or House-fly." In this article Professor Osborn questions the view, first advanced by Hyatt and Arms, that the Diptera are to be considered the highest insects. At the end of the paper appear the following remarks, which were made at the time the paper was read before the meeting:—

"Mr. Smith thought that the line of argument adopted by Messrs. Aldrich and Townsend was inconclusive, and that the article referred to carried with it its own refutation. He thought Mr. Osborn was correct in that the orders should be placed parallel, but that groups or families were more highly developed in some orders than in others. Mere specialization is never a test of rank in itself, and any line of argument that places the Hippoboscidae at the head of the insects as the highest in rank is simply unworthy of attention, since it omits the intellectual or nervous development as a factor."

The over-confident and assuring manner in which the above paragraph disposes of the subject is rather ludicrous. One might fancy the question finally answered, and consigned to oblivion. I feel safe in saying that such a hasty and incompetent dismissal of the subject will command little attention from anyone who is well informed in insect embryology.

Professor Osborn's paper simply makes the point that there are objections to attempting an expression of lineal rank or descent in groups of animals, but that the orders of insects are divergent, or more or less parallel developments from a common form.

The writer, in his note on the subject in *Science* (June, 1892), did not attempt to express the idea that the orders of insects led up in a natural or any other series to the Diptera; nor is any such view held by Hyatt and Arms, or Professor Aldrich, in what they have written on the subject. I desire to say also that I have not in any way upheld the view that the Hippoboscidae should be considered the culminating point, but have rather pointed to the cyclorrhaphous families as occupying that position.

It is very conclusively shown by Hyatt and Arms, *Insecta*, pp. 273-4,