

PREFACE

JEAN HENRI FABRE, author of the long series of "Souvenirs Entomologiques" from which these studies are taken, was a French school-teacher and scientist whose peculiar gift for the observation and description of insect life won for him the title of the "insects' Homer." A distinguished English critic says of him, "Fabre is the wisest man, and the best read in the book of nature, of whom the centuries have left us any record." The fact that he was mainly self-taught, and that his life was an unending struggle with poverty and disappointment, increases our admiration for his wonderful achievements in natural science.

A very interesting account of his early years, given by himself, will be found in Chapter XVII of this volume. The salaries of rural teachers and professors were extremely small in France during the last century, and Fabre, who married young, could barely support his large family. Nature study was not in the school curriculum, and it was years before he could devote more than scanty spare hours to the work. At the age of thirty-two, however, he published the first volume of his insect studies. It attracted the attention of scientists and brought him a prize from the French Institute. Other volumes were published from time to time, but some of Fabre's fellow scientists were displeased because the