

DRAGON FLIES.

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In the months of July and August there are few insects more abundant than the Dragon flies, and none which attract more attention from even the most indifferent observer, and a description of the more common kinds and some account of their habits may not be uninteresting. For the following account we are largely indebted to the graphic description of A. S. Packard, Jun., in our "Common Insects."

In various countries these insects have received various popular names—the French call them Demoiselles; the Germans, Florfliegen or Gauze-flies, or Wasserjungfern or Virgins of of the Water; while the English style the Dragon flies, Horse-stingers, or Devil's Darning-needles. The English terms, although less poetical than those of our European friends, are, we believe, more appropriate to the private character of these insects.

The accompanying illustration of one of our most common species (*Libellula trimaculata*),



Fig. 42.

Fig. 42, will give an idea of the appearance of these insects. Of the general character of the group Packard says:—"Were we to select from among the insects a type of all that is savage, relentless, and blood-thirsty, the Dragon fly would be our choice. From the moment of its birth until its death, usually a twelvemonth, it riots in bloodshed and carnage. Living beneath the waters, perhaps eleven months of its life, in the larva and pupa states, it is literally a walking pitfall for countless aquatic insects; but when transformed into a fly, ever on the wing in pursuit of its prey, it throws off all concealment, and reveals the more unblushingly its rapacious character.

"Not only does its horrid visage and ferocious bearing frighten children, who call it the 'Devil's Darning-needle,' but it even distresses older persons, so that its name has become a by-word. Could we understand the language of insects, what tales of horror would be revealed! What traditions, sagas, fables, and myths must adorn the annals of animal life regarding this dragon among insects!

"To man, however, aside from its bad name and its repulsive aspect, which its gay trap-pings do not conceal, its whole life is beneficent. It is a scavenger, being like that class ugly and repulsive, and holding literally, among insects, the lowest rank in society. In the waters it preys upon young mosquitoes and the larva of other noxious insects. It thus aids in maintaining the balance of life, and cleanses the swamps of miasmata, thus purifying the air we breathe. During its existence of three or four weeks above the waters, its whole life is a continued good to man. It hawks over pools and fields and through gardens, decimating swarms of mosquitoes, flies, gnats, and other baneful insects. It is a true Malthus' delight, and following that sanguinary philosopher, we may believe that our Dragon fly is an entomological Tamerlane or Napoleon sent into the world by a kind Providence to prevent too close a jostling among the myriads of insect life.

"We will then conquer our repugnance to its ugly looks and savage mien, and contemplate the hideous monstrosity—as it is useless to deny that it combines the graces of the Hunchback of Notre Dame and Dickens' Quilp, with certain features of its own—for the good it does in Nature.

"Even among insects, a class replete with forms the very incarnation of ugliness and the perfection of all that is hideous in nature, our Dragon fly is most conspicuous. Look at its enormous head, with its beetling brows, retreating face, and heavy under-jaws—all eyes and teeth—and hung so loosely on its short weak neck, sunk beneath its enormous hunch-

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