THE COMMERCIAL

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DR. FLETCHER ON NATURE STUDY.

The newly formed Natural History Society have laid Winnipeg under a debt of gratitude in securing Dr. Fletcher, of Ottawa, to lecture under their auspices on Tuesday evening. There was a very good attendance in the Y. M. C. A. lecture room, a fair percentage of the city teachers who are in town being conspicuous in the audience. The Rev. W. A. Burman, honorary president, occupied the chair and before introducing the speaker of the evening spoke for a few moments on the aims of the society. Among other things he mentioned a scheme for getting a popular vote on which one of the flowers should be chosen as the flower of this province, following the custom that has been adopted by many of the states of the union.

In introducing Dr. Fletcher, Mr. Burman dwelt particularly on his business in giving an evening to the city after coming off a long and toilsome journey.

Dr. Fletcher was greeted with very hearty applause, on rising, and expressed the pleasure it gave him to see so many present, saying that he had not expected to see more than a dozen, which was the usual thing at rural history meetings.

Dr. Fletcher is one of the ablest speakers that ever favors Winnipeg audiences. He is thoroughly enthusiastic in his subject and presents it graphically in the simplest and choicest language. His voice is full and pleasant and he never hesitates for a word. His address lasted about an hour it is not possible to reproduce it in full, but a few of the thoughts suggested are:

It is impossible to overestimate the value of nature study in the country. Manitoba and the government had done well and wisely in providing for instruction in the public schools. The government of the Dominion and provinces had been the first to move in the matter and Manitoba had speedily followed. The matter had received the attention of the minister of agriculture and more particularly the city minister and the scheme had ably supported by the press, more ably by the two agricultural papers which had been quick to recognize the value to the farmers of the profit of having their children receive a knowledge of the names of the common weeds. "And this knowledge has of great value," said Dr. Fletcher, "I have gone up and down in the province for the last ten years I have repeatedly met with farmers who have told me they have been saved hundreds of dollars by their children knowing how to recognize noxious weeds. There came in the history of weeds," continued the speaker, "when they are in the land and weak, that is the time to attack them. There is no end of weeds, firmly established, that successfully eradicated by any possible process."

Value of Nature Study.

Nature study is valuable because it gives knowledge of common things. I am going to make you a present of a very valuable present. This province of Manitoba is a beautiful province and it is all yours. You may own the title deeds of any portion of it but the whole beautiful province is yours to enjoy. I shall never cease to be thankful for a lesson my father taught me when I was a lad. We were walking through one of the beautiful parks in London, a perfect garden of beauty and I said, "How delightful it would be if all this were ours!" and my father replied: "It is all ours. We possess the whole of it, we can enjoy it to the full just as much as if the title deeds had been handed over to us." Now, have I not made you a beautiful present when I have given you this thought, which may not have come to many of you before, that all this beautiful province of the west is yours to enjoy?

Needless Fears.

Another thought I want to leave with you is that nature study will do away with much of the needless fear of our common wild animals. Papers and many books are greatly to blame for publishing stories of people in our own country being destroyed by wolves and bears. No, as a matter of fact, and I have inquired carefully for years, there is hardly an authentic case of anyone in the west being attacked by wolves. In Alberta mothers pick up their children and make for the house if they hear a wolf howl. Think what it would mean to them to be relieved of this fear. And it can be done by a little careful study and inquiry. Men as to bears; a short time ago there was an account of a man in the Rockies being attacked and killed by a grizzly bear. I was very much interested and made careful inquiry and found that the man had gotten between a bear and her cub on a log and this had infuriated her. The only other case was that of a man who suddenly jumped upon a grizzly as he lay beside a log. After the most diligent inquiry these were the only two cases in the last years I could be at all authenticated. Then people are very much afraid of black bears, possibly because they are the most common, yet I doubt if one authentic case of a black bear attacking anyone in the west can be established. Just take a little time and inquire into some of these bear stories.

Afraid of the Dark.

Perhaps there is no one thing that causes more suffering among children than being afraid of the dark. Now if people would only stop to think, there are not half the dangers to children in the dark that there are in the day; then why do we fear it? familiarity with common things will do much to dispel this fear among children. There is nothing to fear in the dark; they why do we fear it? Very largely because we believe in ghosts. Many people say thoughtlessly that they do not believe in ghosts, but they do. I have tested it more than once. I remember one case in particular of a big husky fellow who declared he was not afraid of anything. I said to him one evening, "Will you kindly fetch my specimen case that I left in the church yard?" He said it would do as well the next day. I said: "You are afraid of ghosts." Oh, no; he was not he did not believe in them, but it was an eerie place to go. I said: "You believe in ghosts, that is why you think it eerie. If you did not, you would know that a church yard is one of the safest places you could go;" and so on through a hundred instances.

Value of Definite Knowledge.

Perhaps the greatest of all good from nature study is that it gives us definite knowledge about common things, everyday things, things close by us. Do you know that scores of pounds of poison are sold every year to poison gophers? How many people have taken the trouble to find out that there are three kinds of gophers? The Flicker Tail, or Richardson gopher, destroys a great deal of crop; the beautiful ten striped gopher makes about half of his living from insects and the other half from grains; and the Franklin gopher preserves far more than he destroys. But the heedless, unthinking amongst us cry, destroy the gophers, without any question as to which kind they will destroy.

Gradually in this Canada of ours we are coming to value exact knowledge, which is another name for science. Thirty years ago the public began to look with eyes of favor on the geologist; with him was associated the mineralogist and the metallurgist, and this led up to the finding of gold, and everyone wants gold. Then the botanists began to be considered useful. They had a knowledge of plants and very many plants were used in medicine, and we might all want medicine sometime, and so the botanists were allowed to be useful. But the man who studied insects was regarded as a harmless lunatic even by the Indians. He was laughed at, scorned. To-day we know that one-half of all the product of our country is affected by insects and fungus growths, and one-fifth is destroyed every year by these two things. The men who studied insects have been able to devise means for protecting the products of this country from any of these insects and growths. About thirty years ago the Colorado beetle began to be heard from. Some of the men returning from the mines of Colorado had brought a few of these beetles and they were considered a great treasure. They were rare in Colorado because the plants they fed on were rare. But the potato bug was of the same family, and the insects rapidly increased until they became a plague. Then men set to work to find something to destroy them. There were long years of experiment and many failures, but at last a simple thing was found—Paris green—and now for a few cents the farmer can protect his whole crop from the ravages of these insects. Definite knowledge of a common thing became a scientific fact.

What Nature Study Is.

Nature Study is, after all, simply looking at an object and thinking at the same time. The great trouble with us is, we look at things but we do not think. I believe, Mr. Chairman, that the human being is the least developed of the animal species. We say we see things, but do we? Seeing should include realizing with all our faculties. This is why the children of the present generation will be so much better equipped than we are, because they will be trained to use all their powers, to think while they look.

After speaking of the importance to be found in studying the perfection of nature, Dr. Fletcher again spoke of the value of the definite knowledge acquired by this study. He said the dread of snakes is almost universal. A great many people do not know that Canada has in all her length and breadth but one poisonous snake. Even in the British Columbia valleys, where rattle snakes swarm and where you can easily find a dozen in a day, I only found two cases of death, one was that of a child who had been sickly when bitten, and the other that of a drunken old Indian who had lain down on a rattler when he was shedding his skin and was most dangerous. I found plenty of stories about rattlers, and indeed one man told me of fifty mules being killed by them, but when these stories were investigated they were not true. Think what happiness this knowledge will bring to people, to have this loathing and fear removed. This old terror of snakes is supposed to date back to that old scene in the garden of Eden, but as a matter of fact it is ignorance and prejudice. If you look at snakes closely they are one of the most beautiful things in creation. Another thing loathed of many is a toad, and yet the eye of a toad is one of the most beautiful things you can possibly look at. In a word the snake and the toad are perfect of their kind.

The utility of nature study is shown very strongly in the matter of disease. Think of all that has been said and written about malaria—of the thousands who have died from it. What is malaria? The disease is caused by a germ, and the only way in which you can get it into your system is by being bitten by a mosquito that has previously bitten somebody who had the disease, and the same is true of yellow fever, that dread scourge. The most careful investigations have proved this beyond the shadow of a doubt and this definite knowledge has made the Roman Campagna a safe place to live for those who take proper precautions. Typhoid, that curse of our army in South Africa and of the American army in Cuba, has been traced to the common house fly. One of the surgeons of the American army was called a fool by his brother doctors because he experimented with a camp where all the food was carefully protected by screens from the flies, but not a man in that camp had typhoid, although there were thousands of cases all around them. Five years ago the medical profession would have laughed at this suggestion; to-day it is accepted as a scientific fact—again, the value of definite knowledge of common things—the mosquito and the house fly.

A Suggestion.

If I might make a suggestion I would say, drop the entomology branch and call it the insect branch of your society. People are often frightened by big words. There is nothing so good as simple language. I do not suppose it will ever come to pass, but I would like to persuade people to stop saying they "commence a thing" and say "they begin it," and to say "they do a thing" and not accomplish it." I would keep the word "frog" out as much as possible, there is too much misapplication of terms. In Canada people call everything that is less than a cat a bug.

Another suggestion that I would like to make is that at your winter gatherings you have sections of insects under the microscope. Say the tongue of a fly or the ear of a cricket. Many people would be surprised to learn that a cricket has his ears in his legs and not in his head.

Another thing that would be of great value, and which is now being attempted in the public schools would be to teach the younger members to recognize plants by their seeds. This will be most valuable knowledge, as by far the greater number of noxious weeds that have come into Manitoba have been brought in with dirty wheat for seed. This is especially true of that enemy of the farmer, ball mustard.

In conclusion, let me say again, the world is yours to enjoy; everything in nature is perfect and because it is perfect it is created for a definite purpose in the scheme of things; and it is our business to find what that purpose is.

There is method in nature, and if we wish to state definite knowledge to others we must be methodical, careful, painstaking, and this leads to truth, which is the end of all good.

Dr. Fletcher was listened to with close interest, and at the close of his address was tendered a very hearty vote of thanks, the mover, Rev. J. McClung, and the seconder, Mr. Hugh McKellar, both making brief addresses of appreciation. Dr. Fletcher suitably acknowledged the vote.

EUROPEAN WHEAT SUPPLIES.

European wheat supplies, unlike those in this country, show the usual decrease in July, says Bradstreets. The total supply on August 1 this year was 47,200,000 bushels, which marks a decline of 8,200,000 bushels from July 1. A year ago in July the decrease was 14,900,000 bushels, while two years ago the decrease was 4,000,000 bushels. Following are the figures of European stocks on the first of each month for eight years past:

[Five figures omitted.]

	1903.	1902.	1901.	1900.	1899.	1898.	1897.	1896.
Jan.	89.8	79.2	71.6	61.9	68.7	71.4	70.0	61.0
Feb.	78.8	77.5	71.3	61.7	66.1	72.7	73.1	65.5
March	73.3	76.9	68.0	68.2	64.3	74.8	72.4	58.4
April	69.0	64.7	69.9	67.7	74.7	78.9	72.0	56.4
May	65.1	55.9	67.4	65.3	79.2	78.1	68.1	52.2
June	62.0	55.5	67.2	70.5	68.1	78.3	66.0	53.7
July	61.4	50.2	59.3	69.4	64.4	74.1	56.9	55.4
Aug.	46.9	38.6	58.1	64.1	62.1	70.0	57.0	47.7
Sept.	46.2	43.1	57.0	63.6	62.2	71.8	46.3	..
Oct.	58.5	57.3	59.7	66.0	67.9	75.2	60.2	..
Nov.	73.8	61.6	68.9	71.6	74.6	67.5	69.4	..
Dec.	89.2	70.5	54.4	71.1	72.4	74.4	71.1	..

The total stock on August 1 this year is shown to be 5,200,000 bushels more than was held on August 1 a year ago, but with that exception it is the smallest held on August 1 since 1898. The consolidated American and European supply is the smallest held since November 1, 1898, as the following figures will show:

[Six figures omitted.]

	1903.	1902.	1901.	1900.	1899.	1898.	1897.	1896.
Jan. 1	147	165	169	167	177	132	156	194
Feb. 1	132	162	167	162	118	128	154	177
March 1	140	167	162	159	124	118	133	172
April 1	128	153	160	161	122	114	122	165
May 1	108	136	149	151	117	107	107	146
June 1	97	110	128	132	116	99	94	133
July 1	81	85	116	127	98	80	79	124
Aug. 1	70	76	115	118	116	58	70	108
Sept. 1	..	81	118	135	117	53	68	107
Oct. 1	109	105	135	154	134	67	96	127
Nov. 1	..	137	139	166	159	88	111	167
Dec. 1	..	154	167	170	166	106	127	172

The total stock here given is only 70,000,000 bushels, a decrease of 11,000,000 bushels from July 1, of 6,000,000 bushels from August 1 last year, of 45,000,000 bushels from 1901 and of 58,000,000 bushels from 1900, but an increase of 12,000,000 over the stock held on August 1, 1898.

No. 1 country hides are hovering between 8¼ and 8¾c in the Chicago market, with very little business doing.

Professor Marshall, the English economist, estimates that the British working classes spend every year not less than "$500,000,000 for things that do nothing to make them either handsome or noble." The president of the British Association, in a recent address, before the economic section, confirmed these estimates; and avowed his belief that many named above was wasted in food alone.