

The Absence of Earthworms from Canadian Prairies.

Not by any means the least remarkable of the very notable series of works which Mr. Darwin has given to the world is that which came last from his pen but a short time previous to his lamented death. Dealing as it does with effects which, when looked at in the detail, are exceedingly small and insignificant, but, when viewed in the aggregate, are shown to be of surprising importance, the "Vegetable Mould and Earthworms" must certainly rank as a most strikingly interesting work.

It is not my desire to call in question the conclusions at which Mr. Darwin has arrived with regard to the action of earthworms in cultivating the soil, but I wish to point out that in one extensive portion of the earth's surface, to which much attention has of late been directed on account of its agricultural capabilities, earthworms do not exist. I refer to the vast region commonly known as Manitoba and Northwest Territories.

The agency which I believe has caused the absence of earthworms from the Northwest is the prairie fires which annually sweep over enormous portions of the country, totally consuming the grass and converting it into a black ash. This, it might well be imagined, would for months together completely deprive any worms that formerly existed of that variety of decaying vegetable matter that composes their food; and assuming that fires have annually passed over large portions of the prairies for scores of generations (as seems in every way probable), it appears to me only reasonable to suppose that this cause would effectually have exterminated the worms from the country or have prevented their occupying it.

As another evidence of the absence of worms, the numerous large glacial bowlders that strew the prairies around Brandon and elsewhere may be cited. These, had worms existed, would doubtless have long ago been lowered beneath the surface, as also the skulls and other bones of buffaloes, which so abound on the prairies, and most of which have evidently lain there a long while. Nevertheless, some of these have been buried in the course of time, as one gentleman told me that he had sometimes turned them up from a depth of two or three inches beneath the surface when plowing. Their burial may have been accomplished by the wind drifting soil over them, or by the working of gophers. Of these peculiar little animals two species are very abundant on the prairies, where they make extensive burrows, which it seems possible may to some extent accomplish the natural cultivation of the soil in the way worms are accustomed to do it elsewhere.

How Colonel Sigafus Paid the Bill.

A story is told of Colonel Sigafus, the old forty-niner millionaire, who is erecting a magnificent castle on the heights back of Tarrytown, who is said to have moved to the East to introduce his heirs, a lovely maiden of eighteen years, to the blue society of the Hudson. The Colonel takes an active part in the construction of his house. With shovel or pick he may frequently be seen leading a gang of workmen and explaining how to dig in the early days of California gold-mining he labored for the precious metal. One day a contractor presented a demand for money. "The shovel, with shovel in hand, had paid out all his small change and did not wish to don his store clothes and go to the city. Throwing down his spade he strode to his apartments over his stable, and hastily cutting twenty thousand dollars of coupons from his Government bonds rode off at a furious rate toward the village. In an hour he returned with a huge package strapped behind his saddle. The contractor was awaiting him. The package, done up with a rope, was unmade, and bank bills of all denominations, from one to a thousand, were exposed and the bill was paid.

A Fine Morning.

"Fine morning, your honor," affably remarked the man who was arrested the night before for being drunk and disorderly. "Yes, indeed," heartily responded the Justice; "quite a fine-morning; in fact a ten-dollar-fine morning."

After this little pleasantry the gentleman was booked for the "Black Maria," and the business of the court went on as usual.

A Few Frigid Facts.

If there is one thing more than another that the country needs—that it absolutely yearns for—it is a law abolishing the temperature crank and his ten-cent thermometer. Both are nuisances in the fullest meaning of the term, and a long-suffering people are, just at this time, losing their temper and their confidence in the wisdom of an all-wise Providence under this double infliction. The man with the ten-cent thermometer is far superior, in point of bore-voiced-deathfulness, to the fellow who asks if this is cold enough for you. The latter is merely seeking information, and you are at liberty to either answer him or turn the remains over to the coroner; but the thermometer fiend isn't a seeker after knowledge; he is loaded to the muzzle already, and only seeks a victim with whom he can divide. It is useless to tell him that his ten-cent, mercury-loaded, bottle-glass and tin-back weather prevaricator is a snare and a delusion; that it doesn't know anything about temperature. He has the utmost faith in the accuracy of his instrument and will accept its statements in the face of contradiction by all the high-priced and high-toned thermometers in the country.

If he finds that she shows thirty-seven degrees below zero, he orders another ton of coal and puts on four more suits of underclothes—though the boys be playing marbles in the alleys, the streets knee-deep in mud and the man in the next yard is spading up ground for his next spring's garden. There is no denying the fact that the ten-cent thermometer is great at getting down to its work. It can make a man's hair stand on end and send the shivers scooting down his spinal column without half trying—that is, if you are foolish enough to place any confidence in the showing it makes. It can go down to forty-two below zero on the pleasantest of Wyoming afternoons, and stay there, "with-out turning a hair," as the horse reporter says. It can show a temperature calculated to freeze the nasal organ off the face of the bronze dog on the front stoop of the Mayor's residence, and stare you in the face with a George Washington stare, while you wipe the perspiration from your face and long for a linen duster and a fan.

When the ten-cent thermometer's owner is obliged by feminine persuasion to get up and light the fire, he looks at his tin weather indicator and finds it registering seventy-five below zero and still going down. He goes down town and makes affidavit before every man he meets that it is seventy-five below, because his thermometer said so. He charges upon the superior excellence of his thermometer, which can, when the weather permits, register all the way down to one hundred below zero, while the ordinary instruments freeze up somewhere about the forty notch. The average cheap thermometer is about as reliable as a gas-meter, or a politician's promise, and its workings as uncertain as the verdict of a jury. Hence we say that if some genius will suggest some plan by which the evil instrument and all believers in it can be swept from the face of the earth into the waste-basket of chaotic eternity, a grateful people will rise up and ask him to take something.

Why He Goes on Crutches.

Mr. Gazely, traveling salesman for the well-known liquor house of Guncane & Racket, now wears a pair of crutches, not for ornament, particularly, but mainly for use. Several days ago Gazely, while en route for a rural seat of trade, fell in with a lot of young fellows, representing many trades and professions. They exchanged cards, flasks and compliments, old jokes and wearisome stories. When Gazely arrived at the small town where he was to transact business, if possible, he proceeded at once to the house whose want, in the whisky line he had ever supplied but upon entering the store he saw that a change in proprietorship had taken place. The proprietor came forward.

"Good morning, sir." "Good morning. I see that this place has changed ownership. I used to do considerable business with your predecessor and hope to merit your confidence." "Your name?" "Gazely handed him a card, not his own commercial past-board, but unfortunately the name and two-line advertisement of a young undertaker he had met on the train. The merchant looked at the card for a moment and said: "I am thankful to say, sir, that I need nothing in your line."

"But you soon will, I hope," replied Gazely. The merchant knit his brows, dropped a stitch, picked it up and proceeded to knit a while longer. "I hope I may not soon need your services, sir. I don't know why you say that my predecessor ever had any dealings with you, for he is a young man."

"I know he's a young man," said Gazely, looking sharply at the merchant, "but what difference does that make? He kept his cellar well stocked with my goods, but that's neither here nor there. I've got the best in the market, and just now we are selling at strikingly low figures. You'll never have a chance to do better and I advise you to lay in a stock at once. Now, for your own individual use, I can do the nice thing by you."

A Long Sleep.

A certain famous historical desert snail was brought from Egypt to England as a chronological specimen in the year 1846. This particular mollusk, (the only one of his race, probably, who ever attained to individual distinction, at the time of his arrival in London, was really alive and vigorous, but as the authorities of the British Museum, to whose tender care he was assigned, were ignorant of this important fact in his economy, he was gunned, mouth downward, on to a piece of cardboard, and duly labeled and dated with scientific accuracy: "Helix desertorum, March 25, 1846." Being a snail of a retiring and contented disposition, however, accustomed to long droughts and corresponding naps in his native sand-wastes, our mollusk thereupon simply curled himself up into the topmost recesses of his own whorls, and went placidly to sleep in perfect contentment for an unlimited period. Every chonologist takes it for granted, of course, that the shells which he receives from foreign parts have had their inhabitants properly boiled and extracted before being exported; for it is only the mere outer shell or skeleton of the animal that we preserve in our cabinets, leaving the actual flesh and muscles of the creature himself to wither unobserved upon its native shores. At the British Museum the desert snail might have snoozed away his inglorious existence unsuspected but for a happy accident which attracted public attention to his remarkable case in a most extraordinary manner.

On March 7, 1850, nearly four years later, it was casually observed that the card on which he reposed was slightly discolored; and this discovery led to the suspicion that perhaps a living animal might be temporarily imprisoned within that tapery tomb. The Museum authorities accordingly ordered our friend a warm bath (who shall say hereafter that science is unfeeling!) upon which the grateful snail, waking up at the touch of the familiar moisture, put his head cautiously out of his shell, walked up to the top of the basin, and began to take a cursory survey of British institutions with his four-eye-bearing tentacles. So strange a recovery from a long torpid condition, equally aided by that of the seven sleepers of Ephesus, deserved an exceptional amount of scientific recognition. The desert snail at once awoke and found himself famous. Nay, he actually sat for his portrait to an eminent zoological artist, Mr. Waterhouse, and a wood-cut from the sketch thus procured, with a history of his life and adventures, may be found even unto this day in Dr. Woodward's "Manual of the Mollusca," to witness if I lie.—Cornhill Magazine.

How the Skeleton was Married.

Rev. B. C. Lippencott, the minister who united Bertha E. Clear and J. B. Garrison, the living skeleton, in marriage, explains how he was induced to perform the ceremony. "He was approached at the ministers' Monday meeting by a young man who asked if he would go with him to marry a couple. Being informed that everything was all right, Mr. Lippencott consented to go, and was conducted to a boarding house in Arch street, where, in an upper bedroom, was Garrison and the young lady. Garrison was dressed in a full black suit, and I had no idea he was a museum curiosity. He said he and the young lady wanted to be married. I requested them to stand up, but the bridegroom said he preferred to be married sitting. Without suspecting that anything was amiss, I married them in that posture. They were certainly married, and no mistake, unless I was dreaming, and I don't think I was. Any day, where is a certificate."

125 Years Old.

Messrs. Francis Newberry & Son, London, England, established for 125 years, write: As a testimonial from one of the old-st drug-houses in Great Britain, respecting your household remedy, will no doubt be of interest to you, we are pleased to make the statement that we have sold St. Jacobs Oil with satisfaction to the public for several years, and that owing to the extraordinary merits of the article, the demand is continually increasing, and that we have heard of many favorable reports regarding its great virtue as a pain-remedy.

THE GENERAL MARKETS.

Table with market prices for various goods like CATTLE, SHEEP, HOGS, WHEAT, CORN, etc. Columns include item name and price per unit.

A HUNTER'S STORY.

How He was Overcome and the Way by which He was Finally Saved. (Correspondence Spirit of the Times.) An unusual adventure which recently occurred to your correspondent while hunting at Brookmere in this State is so timely and contains so much that can be made valuable to all readers, that I venture to reproduce it entire.

The day was a most inclement one and the snow quite deep. Rabbit tracks were plentiful, but they for a specially led in the direction of a large swamp, in which the rabbits could run without difficulty, but where the hunter constantly broke through the thin ice, sinking into the half-frozen mud and his knees. Notwithstanding these difficulties, the writer had persevered, although a very small bag of game was the result. While tramping about through a particularly malarial portion of the swamp, in the middle of the afternoon, he came into view carrying a muzzle loading shot-gun and completely loaded down with game of the finest description. Natural curiosity, aside from the involuntary envy that instantly arose, prompted the writer to enter into conversation with the man, with the following result:

"You've had fine success, where did you get all that game?" "In the swamp." "It's pretty rough hunting in these parts, especially when a man goes up to his waist, every other step." "I don't understand you, but I am used to it, I don't mind it." "How long have you hunted hereabouts?" "Why, bless you, I have lived here most of my life and hunted up to ten years ago every year." "How does it happen you omitted the last ten years?" "Because I was scarcely able to move, I don't understand you?" "Well, you see, about ten years ago, after I had been tramping around all day in this same swamp, I felt quite a pain in my ankle. I didn't mind it very much, but it grew so bad that I was obliged to stop. I used to think it was a cold, but the next thing I knew, I felt the same kind of a pain in my shoulder and I found it pained the more I moved. This thing kept going on, and I became so bad that I was obliged to shake off the feeling and make myself think it was only a little temporary trouble. I found that it did not go. Shortly after this my joints began to ache at the knees and I found that in my body seemed to vibrate with the others to see which could become the largest and cause me the greatest suffering. In this way several years passed on, during which time I was pretty nearly helpless, I could not get up, and I was so sensitive that I would sit bolted up in the chair and call to people that entered the room not to come near me, or even touch my chair. I felt all this was going on, but I was so miserable, my joints would swell I didn't know what to lay it to, but I knew that I was in a very bad way. I felt I had been lunched at the joint; my fingers crooked in every way and some of them became double-jointed. In fact, every joint in my body seemed to vibrate with the others to see which could become the largest and cause me the greatest suffering. 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