

Packard "Our Common Insects".

"To man, however, aside from its bad name and its repulsive aspect, which its gay trappings 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 water it preys upon young mosquitoes and the larvae 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 water, its whole life is a continued good to man. It hawks over pools and fields and through gardens, decimating swarms of mosquitoes, 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."

The popular imagination has invested the dragon-fly with none of that wealth of poetry and romance, which in the literature of many nations, finds in the butterfly the prototype of the human soul, and sees in the three stages of its metamorphosis the stages of human existence — the struggle of life, the tranquillity of death and the reawakening to a new and joyous life. To the dragon-fly, on the contrary, are attributed all sorts of malevolent ~~impulses and capabilities~~. The names in common use testify to the prevalence of this feeling; as "devil's darning needles" they sew up the ears of the mischievous school boy, as "snake feeders" they minister to animals ~~hated and~~ ^{generally} dreaded by mankind, while the belief in their possession of a poisonous sting is so ~~unsubstantiated~~ ^{widespread} that most persons avoid them ~~as carefully~~ ^{even} as they would wasps or bees. ~~Packard in his book~~ "Our Common Insects" appears to ^{have} shared this prejudice, and ^{at any rate he painted} paints a most sinister picture of the creature. ^{dragonfly} "Not only," ~~he says~~ "do its horrid visage and ferocious bearing frighten children, who call it the 'Devil's Darning-needle', but it even disconcerts 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! It combines the graces of the Hunchback of Notre Dame and Dickens' Quilp with certain features of its own. Even among insects, a class replete with forms the very

in connotation 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 back — for it is woefully round-shouldered, while its long, thin legs, shrunken as if from disease, are drawn up beneath its breast, and what a hobgoblin it is! (Our Common Insects, to).

Most entomologists, however, do not share the feeling of aversion which dictated this very unflattering portrait. Howard ~~in this~~ ^{in his} Insect Book ^{places} the dragon-fly next to the butterfly as the most beautiful of our insects; and all speak with enthusiasm, of the sure and graceful flight, the lacy wings and the glittering metallic colors which adorn the body of the insect. The effortless grace of the dragonfly is marked by a most business like purpose, quite in contrast with the dilettante fluttering from flower to flower of the butterfly, but this murderous attacks on small insects trouble us the less, when we learn that mosquitos are among his favorite prey. Poets have not found the

Of course, the first four persons of the party;
~~about~~ took the

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For months a groveller in the mud and silt of some stagnant streams, it finally, by a mighty effort, casts off the nymphal skin, and issuing forth in resplendent guise, lives thereafter as a lord of the upper air, even on the wing in the golden sunlight.

Lampert in his excellent volume "Was Leber des Bunnensquassers" ¹⁹ writes as follows, "Who is not familiar with the brilliantly gleaming dragonflies? With ever new joy our glances follow the lightning swift, unwearying flight of the larger forms, and the tremulous grace with which the smaller species flutter over the glassy water, alighting now here and now there. The more fervently the sun's rays flood the earth, the more swiftly fly the dragon flies, increasingly they dart, with a rustling sound, past one's head, their gauzy wings shining in the sunlight, their slender bodies radiant with metallic luster, and their huge hemispherical eyes gazing in all directions. I have called them "Wasserjungfern" and "Teufels adeln", the former he says is no doubt suggested on account of their slender and graceful bodies," which are more slender in proportion to their size than in any other insect in the whole world."

In the vernacular they are called "Breit schneider", "Augenstörzer" and "Stimmels pferd". I cannot say whether the French name of "Demoiselles" comes from the same association of ideas as "Wasserjungfern", but, in any case, the English have chosen the most appropriate designation in their term "dragon flies", for these glorious creatures are, in truth, veritable dragons; while they glide through the air apparently