

BIOLOGY

NATURE RAMBLINGS

By FRANK THONE



Jimson Weed

Fall pastures become more and more empty and brown, but a few plants still hold the field against the advancing frost. As might be expected, the weeds are the ones that survive most lustily. And among these vegetable hoboes there is none more bold and tough, and in a defiant way more handsome, than the jimson-weed. A prolific blossomer, there will still be flowers on it until a heavy freeze stops all vegetation for the season, but mostly it has finished with this work, and can be distinguished mainly by its heavy crop of round or ovoid, thick-shelled, spiky pods that are even now cracking crosswise and scattering their numerous seeds.

"Jimson-weed and its variant 'jimson-weed' are corruptions of 'Jamestown-weed.' Why the first permanent English settlement in this country should have been given this honor is not clear; but inasmuch as most of the weedy members of his genus are of tropical origin it seems likely that some slaving ship from Africa dumped seed-bearing ballast on the shores of the James River, giving the ill weed its chance to grow apace in a new habitat.

Whatever may have been the origin of the plant, it certainly did not stop long within the limits of its namesake city. It is now found all over the country, growing in impudent immunity in all grasslands and pastures; for it is so nasty to smell, and so bitter to taste, and so wickedly poisonous withal, that not even a hog will eat it.

Its poisonous qualities, however, must be reckoned, paradoxically enough, among the weed's few virtues. Poultices made of its pounded leaves have long been used for the allaying of inflamed bruises, and they are not a mere faith-founded folk-remedy, either; they really work. But the demand for poultices, after all, is not large, and the supply of jimson-weed far exceeds it.

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Calls Milk American Beverage

On this page we report some of the papers which were presented during the meeting of the American Public Health Association in Cincinnati.

The tremendous increase in America's milk consumption has resulted in heavy responsibility for those who produce, handle and supervise our milk supplies, C. A. Holmquist of the New York state department of health declared.

Mr. Holmquist attributes the status of milk as almost a national beverage to four reasons: first, the education of people to the value of milk as a food; second, the serving of milk free or at cost in large industrial plants; third, the advocating of milk by health and milk producers' organizations; fourth, the improvement in quality of both raw and pasteurized milk.

The cleanliness or uncleanness of the bottles that milk comes in constitutes a big public health issue as well, according to Ralph E. Erwin of the Pennsylvania state department of health, speaking in the same section. Manufacturers have taken the hint, Mr. Erwin declared, and have made rapid strides in the last five years in perfecting bottle washing machinery. Many states have laws demanding the careful cleaning of all bottles, added the expert.

War on Heart Disease

Heart disease that causes more deaths than any other malady in the United States held the attention recently of the delegates attending the 56th annual meeting of the American Public Health Association.

Dr. Henry Albert, commissioner of health of Iowa, declared that it is very difficult to determine whether the peak of heart disease mortality has been reached or not because it is produced by so many causes.

To Save Sight of Children

Saving children with defective vision from joining the 100,000 blind people in the United States today is a huge problem confronting school physicians and health workers. To achieve this object programs of sight conservation have been developed in schools, industries and homes, said Dr. B. Franklin Royer, medical director of the National Committee for the Prevention of Blindness.

Attempts are also being made to protect the sight of the pre-school child. By working with a child with poor eyesight at this period it is hoped that the child can enter school with a start equal to those of a child with perfect vision.

"The whole philosophy of sight-saving classes in school," Dr. Royer explained, "is that of minimizing eye use while supplying ideal conditions under which eye work may be undertaken. Intervals of use of the eye alternate with eye rest. The pupil maintains his classroom social contacts for oral recitation with a period of study and special recitation in the specially prepared room. Much instruction is given orally while certain children prepare their lessons with a reading helper. Many of the standard books used are printed in clear 24-point type so that the child is not required to do too close work. Figures tell us that in England and in the large American cities from one in 500 to one in each thousand school children need sight-saving class supervision sometime during their school career."

Much of the blindness in this country can be traced to the prevalence of social diseases, a condition that experts believe can only be improved by better health education and clinical treatment.

"In our civilized country there are still 14 states and one territory that do not require the use of a prophylactic in the eyes of a new born child," said Dr. Royer, urging that all states write this requirement into their laws.

Whooping Cough Control

The death rate of whooping cough has declined less than that of any other children's disease during the past twenty years, Dr. Edward S. Godfrey of the New York state department of health told delegates.

Whooping cough is the least completely reported and its perhaps the most difficult to control of our epidemic diseases, Dr. Godfrey declared. Of the communicable diseases of childhood, it ranks next to diphtheria as a cause of deaths in New York state. Nearly 95 per cent. of the deaths from this cause occur during the first five years of a child's life.

Dr. Godfrey strongly urged more stringent control and careful treatment of all communicable disease with special reference to the age groups that different diseases attack most particularly. Measles claims most victims under one year of age, he stated. Since more children under five succumb to diphtheria, he recommended that immunization campaigns should be planned to reach the pre-school child.

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