



### Misplaced Sympathy

➤ ONE OF THE most popular nursery rhymes, a couple of generations ago, was:

Baby bye, here's a fly,  
Let us watch him, you and I—  
How he crawls up the walls,  
Yet he never falls!

Imagine a present-day nursery jingle calmly assuming the presence of flies in the same room with the baby! And that isn't the whole of it. The next couplet goes on to say:

I believe, with six such legs  
You and I could walk on eggs.

Food that flies have crawled on is now regarded as contaminated. Even if the fly has been only on the outside of the eggshell, we have a creepy feeling that that egg can be redeemed only by boiling.

Old-time toleration of the now-intolerable insect is reflected also in an old favorite German lullaby, which despite the war still figures occasionally in recitals in this country. The watchful mother bids her child, "Sleep on; I'm brushing the flies away from you."

All this dates back to a time when flies were considered only a minor nuisance, not as a menace to health, and when our esthetic sensibilities were not disturbed by a widely publicized knowledge of the fly's filthy breeding and feeding habits. When the terrific typhoid incidence of the Spanish-American War in 1898 made us more acutely fly-conscious, the fly soon ceased to be regarded as a relatively harmless, rather interesting insect, and house screens changed from a semi-luxury to an accepted necessity.

So different was the mental attitude

of our ancestors toward flies that they actually wasted a good deal of misplaced sympathy on the now repulsive insects. "The Spider and the Fly" was a favorite ballad in the later nineteenth century; and there was a long poem of the temperance-preaching era in which the wicked saloonkeeper was portrayed as a spider and his bemused, befuddled customer as a poor, harmless, foolish fly.

It is worth noting that the literature of the past 25 or 30 years contains practically no reference to flies as innocent or even interesting.

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#### EXPLORATION

### Next Steps for Science In the Study of the Arctic

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*Excerpt from an address before the  
Science Talent Institute.*

➤ ALL THE PROBLEMS of the Arctic may be regarded for their own sake or in relation to some human need. Personally I prefer to consider them from the point of view of human geography and in relation to man. Bringing them together thus under the aspect of the habitat of the natives, I try to understand their influence upon his customs and ways of life. To understand the life of the inhabitant of the Arctic, the Eskimo, the Samoyede, the Tchuckchi, we must know his country, his geography, his geology, his soils, his climate, his flora and fauna. And it is not certain that polar radiation, winds, clouds and precipitations, glaciers and icebergs, tides and ocean-currents, atmospheric refractions, the magnetic pole and the aurora, are without an influence on the inhabitants of the great polar night and day just as great perhaps as the flora and fauna. But let us pass over all these things and confine ourselves to the flora.

There is a law governing the distribution of population on the globe. This is: A country can contain only as many inhabitants as it can nourish. Now these food resources are essentially vegetable; for man feeds not only on plants but on animals which are nearly all herbivorous. The very true observation has been made that it is not really the reindeer which makes life possible in the high latitudes and severe climate of Asia and North America, it is rather the

lichens or mosses which reach those latitudes and which nourish the reindeer. Thus, the Antarctic is not populated, because no plant can grow there. Plants are more dependent than man on the climatic factor. The climate, however, is not the only influence on the life of plants. The nature of the soil has its importance also.

Rather than dwell on the purely climatic classifications, it is therefore more logical to determine the climato-botanical classifications of human life.

Let us leave aside the equatorial zone with its lofty virgin forests and its wild and uncivilized peoples and also the tropical, subtropical and temperate zones and consider only the frigid zone. As one approaches the pole, the forest becomes thinner, the temperature becomes lower, the precipitation less abundant, the soil becomes almost continually frozen and arboreal vegetation becomes impossible. The tree-limit crosses the 70th parallel and reaches 71 degrees north in Europe and Asia, where there are found a few birch-trees or larch-trees; but in Canada the tree limit does not go to the 68th parallel.

North of that there are only grassy spaces, and finally the grass itself disappears before the moss and lichens. A few dwarf birches, which only exceptionally reach 50 centimeters and which have only the name of trees, wind about the surface of soil. It is the domain of the tundra. The vegetation is precarious, but sufficient to nourish a few animals indispensable to man; the reindeer in Canada and Asia; the musk-ox in Greenland, Ellesmere, the Isle of Devon. It thus permits human populations, but only of the sporadic, dispersed kind, condemned to permanent nomadism in order to obtain its indispensable nourishment. In the southern hemisphere, with neither flora nor terrestrial fauna, the Antarctic

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