

A PLEA FOR THE PUBLICATION OF A NEW
ILLUSTRATED FLORA OF THE
PROVINCE OF QUEBEC.

In the annual report of "The Quebec Society for the Protection of Plants" for 1911-1912, the following statement appears: "Many years ago Abbé Provancher published a work entitled '*Flore du Canada*' in two volumes, which has been out of print for some years, and is now very difficult to procure. No work on systematic botany has taken its place in Quebec, consequently this phase of the study of plant life has been, to a large extent, neglected in the French schools of the province. I would, therefore, suggest that the society request the Government of the province not only to reprint a revised edition of Provancher's work, but also to publish a school edition of the same. The publication of these two editions would give a stimulus to the study of plants, and indirectly would tend to a better knowledge of weeds on the part of the rising generation."

As an admirer of Abbé Provancher, and one who, moreover, has followed closely in his footsteps for the past ten years, I beg leave to express an opinion on the matter.

There is no doubt that the name of Provancher has a prominent standing in the history of Canadian science. Under struggling circumstances, without special training or laboratory facilities, far from technical libraries, he, however, accomplished a stupendous amount of work and cleared the ground most efficiently for future workers.

The "*Flore Canadienne*" was a most extraordinary achievement for the time, and, although fifty years have passed,—fifty years of feverish activity—even though it is now largely obsolete on account of the steady advance in botanical studies, we must admit whatever our language is that no other book, as yet, has attempted to displace it.

Nevertheless, the proposal of reprinting Provancher's work is a rather sad acknowledgment of inability; to state my opinion briefly, I consider that such a reprint, if the essential features are preserved, would be a step backwards.

In the course of the last half century the systematic botany of North America has benefited by the labour of a host of serious workers. Unknown regions have been penetrated, thousands of new species established and the nomenclature more than once disturbed and subjected to new investigations.

Mentioning only the Province of Quebec, the careful survey of Prof. M. L. Fernald and his Harvard friends has shown, in the Gaspé Peninsula, the existence of an altogether unknown flora akin to that of the Rockies. Of this fact, of course, Provancher had no suspicion.

Such genera as *Isoetes*, *Potamogeton*, *Juncus*, *Carex*, *Rubus*, and especially *Crataegus*, have revealed an amazing wealth of species. Everybody knows the hawthorn, and appreciates it more or less, but very few would suppose that the American species now number about 1,000. The joint work of C. S. Sargent and J. G. Jack have shown the limestone ridges of Montreal and the contiguous shales to be one of the richest regions in the whole world in forms of *Crataegus*. Although there is much yet to do in the genus, it can already be foreseen that the new Flora of Quebec will be bound to include as many as 60 or 70 species.

I do not wonder now about my perplexities while first trying to separate the Longueuil *Crataegi* with Provancher as a guide. It was only when I opened the pages of the seventh edition of Gray's Manual, and when I was made acquainted with Mr. C. S. Sargent, that I began to understand something regarding them.

Provancher believed the distribution of plants in Canada to be zonal, according to latitude, and, consequently, to be approximately identical from the Atlantic to the Pacific; this belief he had in mind when he entitled his work "Flore Canadienne." This generalization has not proved successful. We know to-day, by the collections of Macoun and others, that the prairie region, the Rockies, the Pacific slope, have each a distinct flora, and a "Canadian Flora" embodying the whole of the territory, would be an immense enterprise.

Properly speaking, Provancher covers but the central portion of the Province of Quebec. The list, with analytical keys, annexed by Abbé Moyen to his own "*Traité de Botanique*," though more complete, is yet fragmentary, and must undergo the very serious criticism of lacking the descriptions necessary to every one except the trained specialist.

I think that the demand is for a new "Flore Illustrée de la Province de Quebec," embodying the Ungava territory, and brought up to the present state of botanical science.

Such a publication is no easy task. Difficulties are numerous, and foremost among them would be the cost of production, including the necessary illustrations. These latter alone would cost a large sum. I hardly think that any private enterprise in this line would be possible. It seems that the Provincial Government should take charge of the work, through one of its departments, subsidizing it as the work goes on.

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