

**AN IMPORTANT AND PECULIAR
DISCOVERY IN NATURAL HIS-
TORY—CAN IT AFFECT AGRICUL-
TURAL INTERESTS?**

It has been recently discovered that certain plants not only catch and destroy animal prey, but that they digest and absorb its nutritive elements by a process analagous to that which the human stomach performs. A few months ago we were incredulous as to a certain cannibal plant described in the newspapers, and we took the story as it came to us for what it was worth, that is with several grains of salt. In this article we will give our reasons for believing the truth of the discovery mentioned in our opening sentence, and we suggest to the farmers of North and South Carolina to see if this scientific revolution can be made of practical benefit to them. For the last year or two the subject has been agitated by leading European and American periodicals, which gave the principal facts connected with it; but Mr. Darwin in his "Insectivorous Plants" gives the first systematic exposition of the matter. Mr. Darwin's observations are confined in a great part to the *Drosera rotundiflora*, commonly called "sun-dew," which belongs to a species of plants growing in portions of the Old World, and in America from Canada to Terra del Fuego. His attention was first called to it in 1860, when he observed a great number of insects caught on its leaves, and believing this could scarcely be the result of accident, he commenced a series of elaborate experiments, the results of which he gives in the work referred to. The plant has little, almost no root and is

sustained by the insects that alight on its juicy leaves. It derives its poetical name from the glittering drop which shines on its leaves after the sun has dried the night dews. The leaf, as soon as it is touched by the smallest insect, begins to elevate itself, and gradually forces its prey into the centre of the plant. This phenomenon was carefully and repeatedly observed by Darwin.

We are not addicted to sensations, but as this is vouched for by such high scientific authority, and has been approved by the scientific world, would it not be well for some enterprising farmer to see if this plant can not be made to become a valuable ally to the birds in keeping his fields free from pestiferous insects? We would not quote Darwin on every subject, but our own observation forces us to think he is deserving of our consideration and gratitude for developing and explaining this discovery.

Among various insect-eating plants described by the distinguished scientist mentioned, the most remarkable is the *Dionaea*, "a small plant which grows in a limited district in North Carolina." The plant referred to is the "fly-catcher" or Venus fly trap, which grows chiefly, we believe, in the Cape Fear section.

It would be impossible in our limited space to quote some of Mr. Darwin's most interesting paragraphs. We have only endeavored to give our readers an idea of what they will gain by reading the work. An able critic on the volume says, "We recommend it especially to those who are inclined to distrust Mr. Darwin as a biologist, for scarcely any of his works illustrate so conspicuously the tireless industry with which he accumulates facts and the extreme care with which he guards his conclusions."
