

SASKATCHEWAN'S OWN LILIES

by

L.T. Carmichael

When Saskatchewan first selected the western red lily (*Lilium umbellatum*) as the floral emblem of the province, it was a fairly common plant across the prairie. In late June and early July its orange-red flower along the roadside, in low sandy soils, peering above the green grass of the meadow, was a most attractive sight. Loved, admired and easily recognized by all, it was eagerly sought after - and picked.

With no thought of harm being done, the motorist, on a leisurely run in the refreshing coolness of a long summer evening, would stop. The entire family, with joyful enthusiasm, would run here and there, breaking the plants off at the ground level, picking great bunches, filling their pails, their arms and even the back seat of the car. Arriving home, they confiscated every available vase and fruit sealer and jar, crowding the delicate flowers together, like prisoners in an enemy concentration camp, until the natural beauty of the mass entirely disappeared and the individual lilies hung their heads in shame, never to look upwards again towards the blue sky and the setting sun.

The lily is still our flower emblem, but where is it? Year by year they gradually have been disappearing. No longer do they wave a prairie welcome to our visiting tourists, travelling along our trunk highways, but have retreated back and back to hidden meadows and lonely trails.

This is an appeal to those who love nature to protect the lily before it is too late. Those who have gathered it so indiscriminately little realized that in picking the flower they were destroying the plant, even though it is a perennial. Into the flower the lily puts its supreme effort. After blossom time the leaves, through their photosynthetic efforts, build up the necessary reserve food supply for another year. When the flower is picked it is nearly always broken off low down and the leaves are taken with it - and so the bulb remains depleted and the roots die or require several years to regain strength enough to produce more flowers.

As a province and a nation we have made many mistakes, recognized to our sorrow only when it was too late. We have over-gunned the ducks, drained the swamps and then wondered why the game birds were disappearing; we have killed to the last bird the myriad passenger pigeons; we have slashed our forests with no thought of the future; we have turned valuable prairie land into a dust bowl; we have eliminated our natural buffalo population and have hunted to extinction species after species. Let us take the lesson, learned through the lack of conservation, to heart and preserve our precious wild flowers.

Flowers such as the red lily should be the heritage of mankind for all time. They are in danger of destruction. We have no right to deny to future generations the joy of their presence - no right to rob our children of a heritage which is as rightfully theirs as ours. Admire the beauty of our provincial floral emblem. "For Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these," but refrain from destroying it, that others may later join in the admiration.

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As a footnote to Mr. Carmichael's timely article we would ask members if they absolutely MUST gather the Red Lily, to be sure and exercise the greatest care in so doing. CUT the stems rather than try to break them off and be sure to leave at least one third of the leafy portion to ensure replenishment of the bulb. Any attempt to gather the lily by hand usually means that the whole stem comes up, and then, not only has that particular plant been destroyed, but also other plants which might have sprung from its bulb.

Far better - as Mr. Carmichael suggests - is it to enjoy the beauty of the lily as it grows, LEAVING IT FOR OTHERS TO ENJOY. If every member of the Y.N.H.S. would try and practice this, and also 'talk' it, the idea would quickly spread and the attention of the general public would be drawn to the crying need of protecting our Saskatchewan flower emblem.