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ORDWAY
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MACALESTER
COLLEGE

located at 9550 Inver Grove Trail (Dakota County Road 77), Inver Grove Heights, Minn.

A WALKING-STICK at ORDWAY

Walking the fields and woods is the more enjoyable when it is done in leisurely fashion. However, if one walks with a purpose and attempts to make time, particularly on a steep path, a walking-stick comes in handy. I acquired a walking-stick one late summer's day in an interesting way.

The Big Bluestem Grass (Andropogon girardi) was unusually tall that year (1977), the result of ample summer rains and an early spring burn-off. The result was a magnificent stand of this beautiful native prairie grass along the ridges of the property. While walking through the vibrant herbage, which rippled and almost flowed in the midday breezes and engulfed one with its 9-foot, tassel-ended stalks I stopped to gaze out as best I could upon the general beauty of the grassland. A persistent tickling on the back of my neck seemed to be caused by something other than the bobbing seedheads of the grasses and so I removed whatever "flotsam" I had picked up along the way; when my hand came away I had a walking-stick with it.

It was indeed a Walking-Stick (Diaperomera femorata), a longer-than-average one which measured a good four inches in length. Its explorations had apparently taken it to near the top of one of the grass-stalks whence it had transferred to my shoulder. Along with a student-companion I was able to have a leisurely examination of this long, wingless insect whose stick-shaped body so startlingly blends with its environs not only in form but in color and texture as well. Outstanding, too, was the light-green color of its legs, looking for all the world like slender blades of grass. The remainder of its body did, indeed, look like a brownish, segmented twig for its thorax and abdomen ran uninterruptedly back from its small head. Its long, threadlike antennae flowed back from its forehead more than half the length of its body.

Yes, everything about this creature formed and heightened the illusion of its being a natural but inanimate object - a masterful example of nature's deception by which some of her creatures gain some advantages in a very competitive world, part of it defensive and part of it a boon to finding food without itself being destroyed. It is a leaf-eater, usually of trees but this particular specimen was exploring other vegetation types although there was a stand of New Jersey Tea (Ceanothus americanus) not far away and it may be that the leaves of this small shrub had been sustaining my particular specimen. Placed on the stem of a Bluestem the interesting creature, having been momentarily distracted by his "capture", turned once again to his search for food, blending most marvelously with his surroundings and was soon lost to my sight.

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